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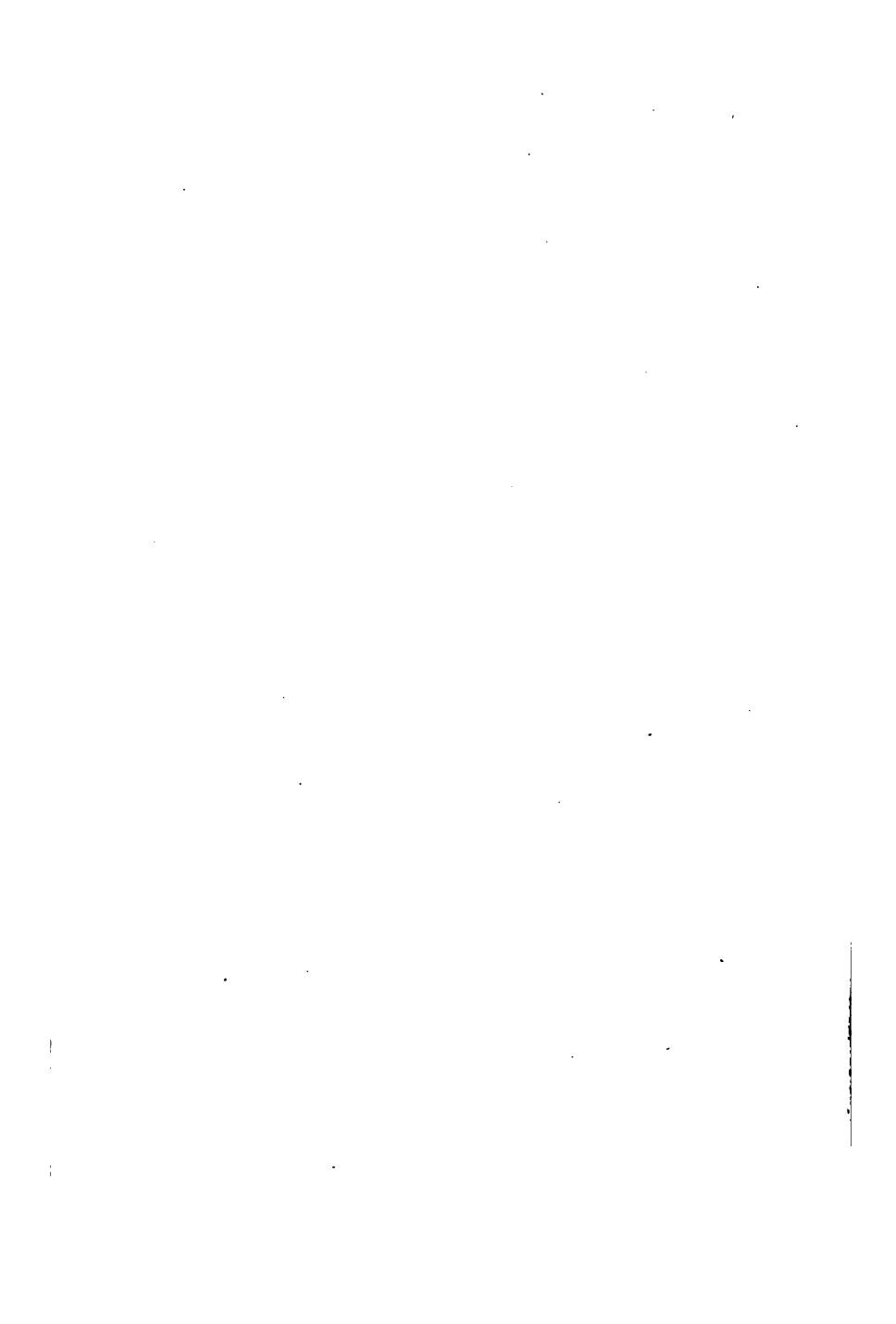


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THE
BLACKEST OF LIES.

A Novel

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

ALBANY DE FONBLANQUE,

Author of "A Tangled Skein," "Cut Adrift," "Filthy Lucre," &c., &c.

"And the parson he made it his text that week, and he said likewise
That a lie which is half a truth is ever *the blackest of lies*,
That a lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight."

TENNYSON.

VOL. II.



London:
REMINGTON AND CO.,
NEW BOND STREET, W.

1882.

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251. k. 191.

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THE BLACKEST OF LIES.

CHAPTER I.

“MY LADY WON’T GIVE IN.”

SOMETHING in the nature of a chronological retrospect may be of use to fix the action of this story clearly in the reader’s mind—so here it is:—

SUNDAY, AUGUST 15TH.—The Rev. Owen Hilyar arrives at the Grand Hotel at Barwell, and makes the acquaintance of Mr. René Ranellett.

MONDAY, AUGUST 16TH.—The Rev. Owen Hilyar’s name appears in the Barwell visitors’ list. Lady Pembury arrives and goes to hear the band. The ladies at Alma

Terrace do not. Mr. René Ranlett and the Rev. Owen Hilyar have an unpleasantness about Miss Herbert, and the former is lost.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 17TH.—The Rev. Owen Hilyar is found at one o'clock in the morning. Lady Pembury handles the affair "delicately," and a comedy in one act is performed at luncheon. Judge Ranlett and his son prepare to go to London next day.

René had seen but little of Pearl on the Sunday, less on Monday, and up to the time we left him on the Tuesday he had not had the chance of meeting her at all.

It seemed to him that they had been apart for weeks. After a good deal of argument, *pro* and *con.*, between father and son, it was agreed that the latter should call that evening at Alma Terrace to take leave—as the former put it. No reference was to be

made by René to the meeting in the Dell, and if the subject were introduced by Pearl it was to be—as the Judge said—*shunted*.

“ And cut the visit as short as you can, sonnie,” he advised, “ for you’ll have hard work to keep a straight face, with your heart as full as it is—poor boy ! ”

For the first time René found the hall door closed. Heretofore he had been expected. Mab had been on the watch for him ; had kissed him in the front garden, and led him captive up the steps. He had to ring the bell now, and when it was answered, the servant found him so busy thinking of what he was to say that he did not know for whom to ask.

“ Are they in ? ” he stammered, and was invited into the front room as—“ Please ma’am ! *the gentleman !* ”

He found Cissy Marshall alone, seated at the table writing a letter.

"Oh, how glad I am!" he exclaimed, with pleased surprise, "to see you off your sofa. You must be much better?"

She gave him one of her quick reading looks, and then she held out her hand.

"Yes," she said, "I am much better. I can get across the room with this now. See!" holding up a slight, but strong ebony stick with a crutch handle in tortoise-shell and gold. "Ain't it pretty! Pearl gave it me before—gave it to me this morning."

"And Mab?"

"Mab's upstairs, crying."

"Been naughty? I'm sorry for that."

"No she ain't neither. She's crying because her Auntie's gone and left her."

"Gone! left her!" René exclaimed, "has Pearl—has Miss Herbert gone?"

"Went this morning."

"But where—why?"

“Where? to London—why?—to attend to her own business. Don’t you know she has a lot of property to look after? what else should she go for?”

Here again the quick, searching look.

“Has she gone alone?”

“Now who on earth has she to go with her? I mean” (flushing a little), “who has she here? Of course she has gone alone. She don’t want no one to take care of her. She can take care of herself.”

“I also am going to London,” René said, after a pause, “perhaps I might be of some use to her there. Will you please give me her address?”

“I don’t know it, she didn’t say where she was going.”

“But she will write—you will know in the morning, and if I were to call”—

“It wouldn’t be no good,” Cissy inter-

rupted. "She won't write. She hates writing."

"Can you tell me the name of her lawyer?"

"Oh, she's done with law."

"Or her man of business. Surely there is some one who acts for her?"

"P'r'aps, but I can't tell you who he is."

"Mrs. Marshall," said René gravely. "You must excuse my saying that this looks more like a case of *will* not, than cannot. Is there any reason in your mind why I should not have the pleasure of offering my services to Miss Herbert in London?"

"She hates to have any one fussing and prying about her," Cissy replied uneasily. "She told me not to tell—anyone."

"That would mean anyone who would fuss and pry; I hope you know me better than to think that I would intrude. All I

ask is the opportunity of placing myself at her orders. If she rejects my offer I should obey her. Now, my dear Mrs. Marshall, just consider how impolite it would look. There are a thousand things that a lady cannot do for herself in London by herself. I am sure she would have accepted my services beforehand, if she had known I was going also. And you own she did not forbid you to tell *me* her address.”

“It’s not a bit of good your coaxing and talking like that, Mr. Ranlett,” said Cissy, with guilty impatience. “She’s her own mistress, and can go where she pleases, and do what she likes. She could have a house of her own and carriages” (pronounced carriages), “and horses, but becoz she chooses to live with us, that ain’t no reason why she should tell us everything, or we should ask. It ain’t no business of ours. I tell you I

don't know where she's gone, and I promised not to tell, and I won't—there ! ”

This was most perplexing to René. He had expected to find them all together as usual. He intended to tease little Mab about the visitors' list, to ask what he could do for them in London ; and then, after some chat about things in general, to jump up with a cheery, “ Well, I've got a lot of packing to do,” and take his leave.

Thus, even if the worst came to the worst, he would have acted kindly and like a gentleman, and if—as he believed—there was a mistake or a slander, it could never be thought that he had joined in the one, or credited the other.

All this was thrown out of gear. Pearl had flown ! Poor honest Cissy's manner said, “ She has flown from *you*,” as plainly as though she had spoken the words.

Why had she flown? Because she had recognised Owen Hilyar and anticipated an exposure? That was how his father would read her conduct, and how could he reply? His heart told him that she had gone to avoid an explanation which might be painful to her, though not criminating; but what the heart of a young man in love tells him is a poor plea to urge against the reasoning of a cool old loving head like the Judge’s. He shivered as he thought what he would have to say when he returned to the hotel. Perhaps the Judge would take Pearl’s disappearance as conclusive of her guilt, and deem further inquiry a waste of time.

Pearl’s disappearance! If she really intended to avoid him, how easily she could do so for ever!

Good or bad, he might never see her again. As thus he pondered with knit brows and

averted face, he did not know that Cissy's eyes were fixed upon him, full of tears.

After a while she broke the silence.

"I've got good news from George—from my husband," she said.

"Yes."

"He's got an offer to manage some glass works in London—think of that! and carry out his new experiments there. It's a big thing too" (referring to a letter which she had been answering when he came in). "The Albert Glass Works, near the Surrey end of Vauxhall Bridge. Used to be Barkdale and Payne, but they dissolved partnership. Mr. Barkdale keeps the works, and I—that's George you know—am to have the sole management of them."

"So the American scheme is given up?"

"He don't say nothing about that," Cissy replied. "That'll depend upon how things

turn out. I hope it isn't. It 'ud be such a good thing for Pearl."

"She would go with you?" René asked.

"Why, of course! She'll never leave us, bless her dear heart! What are you smiling at?"

"At your being so fond of each other," said René.

This was a fib. He was smiling at the clue she had unwittingly supplied. The Albert Glass Works, Vauxhall Bridge Road, would give him George Marshall, George Marshall would give him Cissy Marshall, and Cissy Marshall would give him Pearl Herbert sooner or later.

"It would be odd if we wasn't," said Cissy in reply to the fib.

"Have you known each other long?"

Cissy returned suit with a smile and a fib—

“ Oh ! ever since we were children.”

This puzzled René. Cissy must have been in the brickfields when Pearl was a child. Here was a fine opportunity for testing the truth of Lady Pembury's story, which his father had repeated to him. According to this, Pearl was brought up by a most charming mother, widow of a distinguished officer, in a cottage *orné*, and visited upon equal terms by Lady Hilyar. How could she know a poor brickmaker's child ?

“ And your friendship survived your marriage ? ” he observed lightly. “ Marriage is said to be a powerful dissolvent of boy and girl friendship.”

“ I don't know what you mean by *dissolvent*, but we wasn't boy and girl,” practical Cissy replied.

“ I should have said the ‘ friendship of boys and girls. ’ ”

“I ain’t the only one as makes mistakes you see,” said Cissy with a self-satisfied nod.

“But, Lord ! I ain’t ashamed. I never had no—I never had any chance of learning better till I was married, and she used to come and teach me.”

“Meaning Miss Herbert ? ”

“Why, of course ! She teaches me now, and Mab too.”

“You used to be neighbours, then ? ”

Cissy leaned back in her chair and laughed outright. The movement, however, caused her a twinge of pain, which brought her merriment to a sudden end. Perhaps something else smote her, for she answered in quite a changed manner—

“What can it matter to you if we was ? You’re asking too many questions, Mr. Ranlett.”

René bit his lip. To be outflanked thus on the very threshold of success was provoking.

"One more," he said, after a moment's reflection, "and I have done. That Mr. Price who was clever enough to detect your husband's talent, is he alive?"

"Yes, and hearty."

"I am glad to hear it. Men of his stamp are scarce. I suppose he's going on in the same way—*bricks and tiles, bricks and tiles?*" imitating George Marshall's imitation of the obstinate old gentleman.

"Just the very same," said Cissy, laughing again.

"And in the old place?"

"Yes, but they've got more ground now. They work right down to the station."

"The station! What station?"

"Why Beckhampton Station to be sure!

How stupid you are to-night,” said Mrs. Marshall.

* * * * *

“So you see, sir,” said René sadly, when he had faithfully reported to his father (according to their contract) the result of his visit as above recorded, “we need not seek for photographs. Hilyar is right so far.”

He looked up for the emphatic decision he expected, and feared; but the Judge had tight hold of his chin with one hand, and the other thrust deep in its pocket—a certain sign that he was puzzled.

“That fellow who said ‘nothing happens but the unexpected’ had a level head sonnie,” he remarked reflectively. “This looks bad. She has actually taken fright, and run off; but something happened whilst you were away which mixes things again. It seems

that Lady Pembury sent for her husband's doctor (who is chairman of the gardens committee) told him her story about Miss Herbert, and asked him to have her refused admission to the gardens, without letting out who his informant was. This he declined to do. 'Very well, then,' said her ladyship in a temper, 'my brother shall give you formal notice that she is not a fit person to be seen there—it is his duty as a clergyman—and if you disregard it, I will have your conduct published, and ruin the place.' With that Hilyar was lugged in, and flatly refused to do anything of the kind. When taunted by his sister for having warned you against Miss H. as a dangerous and improper person, he said he had already told you he might be mistaken. This knocked my lady out of time, and ended the application; but, of course, as we had been dragged into it, the

doctor—who is my doctor, too—came questioning me, and I made him tell what had passed upstairs. I'd give a heap to know what brother and sister had to say about it when they were alone together."

\. "It might help them to know that Miss Herbert is out of the reach of any such insult," said René with suppressed anger.

"The question is," continued the Judge in his musing manner, "which of the two knows most, and *best* about it. If she does, she may satisfy him that he was right in his first view. If he is, he can talk till he's hoarse without altering her opinion. Lady Pembury is a woman; she's mad* about a woman, and will never go back upon what she has said."

"I did not think it was in her to be so vindictive," said René.

* American for "angry."

“Vindictive isn’t the word, sonnie. It is the instinct of self-defence mixed up with fear and jealousy. You can’t get a stronger combination than that. And it’s right René—right, as a matter of principle, that Lady Pembury should resent having to brush skirts with such a person as she supposes Miss Herbert to be.”

“She has no right to defame her upon supposition,” René interrupted warmly.

“You call her ‘vindictive,’ and we are discussing the general principle—not the particular case. Lady Pembury is right from her point of view; and if all her class were to agree that they would never enter any place to which the *demi-monde* were admitted, they would deserve well of society. But they should do more than that. They should go for the men who enable those women to brush skirts with them. They should go for

those who *make* vice, and gild it, should strike them off their invitation lists, and cut them wherever found.”

“We have a shorter way,” said René, drily.

“Yes, sonnie, and they call us savages for using it. We kill the man, and give the woman a chance of doing right. Here they gave the man another chance—of doing wrong, and kill the woman! That’s the difference between their civilisation and our savagery.”

* * * * *

The next morning just as the Judge and René had taken their places in the train for London, and it was on the point of starting, they saw the Rev. Owen Hilyar rush upon the platform and just catch the last second-class carriage.

“There has been a mess, sonnie,” said the Judge, “you can bet your life on it, and my lady won’t give in.”

CHAPTER II.

DOWNING V. HERBERT AND OTHERS.

It is now high time that the reader should inform himself respecting the case of *Downing versus Herbert and Others* which has been referred to several times in this history. Taking the written statement made by Pearl for the information of her lawyers, and some of "poor young Downing's" letters, we get to one side of the story which led to it.

Baby Budd had a good spot in her heart, though it was found by a whim. It was her whim to befriend the girl she had known in her poorer and better days, and to keep her from harm—at any rate from *common* harm.

"There's a plenty of good things going for

"a girl like you," she said, "so cheer up, get well, and don't throw yourself away."

The "good thing" soon presented itself in the "poor young Downing" we have heard of—a gentleman by birth and education, with an independent fortune of several thousands a year, but who—from causes which do not enter into this narrative—had, what is called "fallen into habits of intemperance." He generally came drunk to the house in Chester Square, and kept so.

He would cry and plead for drink; bribe the servants to get him any sort of liquor from the public-house, so that it was strong; would steal liquor from the sideboard when no one was looking; or, in other moods, break it open and help himself in defiance of all. The only one who had the slightest control over him was Pearl Herbert.

"Make him marry you," said her utterly unscrupulous friend, "and cure him."

That very night he had a fit of *delirium tremens*, and of course could not be removed. No one, not even the hospital nurse with all her strength and practice, could manage him, but Pearl. In his half-crazy, half-maudlin state he had no consideration for her. She had to be day and night by his side, to brush the snakes, and rats, and devils of his madness, away from his bed.

Once, in a paroxysm of the disease, he flung a tumbler at her, and inflicted a serious wound on the side of her head. A day or two afterwards, when the nurse's back was turned, he sprang to the window, opened it, and would have jumped out, but for Pearl's presence of mind.

"All the snakes are in the street," she cried, "for goodness' sake don't go down to them."

Upon which he slunk back to his bed.

With returning health, came gratitude, the old instincts of the gentleman—and love. He proposed for his nurse, and was refused without a moment's hesitation. Baby Budd abused them both—Pearl for refusing, and Downing for asking—so soon.

“Don't you see, old fellow,” she said, “that you've got to let her know that you've given up shying tumblers? Wait and try again, *but get her out of this.*”

He did. He bought for her the lease and goodwill of a girls' school that happened to be for sale in a small country town, and hired an old servant of his family and his wife, to keep house for her. She took this as a matter of right. It cost only a few hundreds, and surely she had earned that by her long patience and suffering at his bedside, to say nothing of having saved his life!

Six months passed, and he tried again. This time she did hesitate. Her life was dull and hard. The school barely paid expenses; her work was uninteresting; the pupils—daughters of small tradesmen and farmers—were stupid and pert.

Downing was quite himself again, handsome, persistent, loyal to every promise he made, considerate for her in all ways. She liked him—more; she admired him, and felt for him that interest one has in a creature one has saved, if it be only a fly out of the cream jug. But love could not come, and she told him so. He did not care, he would *make* it come.

“Cornered” (as René might have said), she hit on a plan to gain time, at least. He must consult his family. He told her that his father was long dead, that his mother—of whom in worldly matters he was independent

—would be sure to make a row about his marrying *any* one ; that besides her, he had only some uncles, and aunts, and cousins for whom he didn't care a rap ; and that “ it was all nonsense.” But she stuck to her decision, and he went home to break the news.

He found that his mother—far from objecting to his marriage upon general principles—immediately invited a young lady (an heiress of her acquaintance), to spend a month with them, and “ threw her at his head.”

This extra obstacle troubled and vexed him. He did not behave politely to the young lady, he became silent and irritable.

The hunting season was on. He bought a vicious horse against all advice, rode recklessly, and was brought home on a hurdle—dead.

When his will was opened it was found

that after adding liberally to his mother's jointure, and making some small bequests to servants and the like, he had left the whole of his property to Pearl Herbert.

* * * * *

Now for the other side. Pearl Herbert and Mary Forbes, *alias* Baby Budd, were old friends and confederates, and the former was the worse of the two. The Budd's open and daring profligacy sounded notes of warning which only the very foolish could disregard. She was the rattle-snake with a full orchestra of alarms.

Pearl was the silent spider with a lovely parlour into which the flies walked without fear, to be gobbled up quietly. Poor young Downing was "as nice a boy as ever you met" before he fell into her web. She plied him with drink, and under its influence

cajoled him into a promise of marriage, and got him to make his will in her favour. Thus she secured herself. If he died of *delirium tremens* she would have his property. If he recovered and kept his word, she would have him, *and* his property. If he recovered and broke that promise, she would extort a good round sum of hush-money. She made herself right in all events, "the artful wretch!" and there was no escape for her poor victim. Once—when in despair he tried to force his way out of her house, they had a struggle, during which she fell, and cut her head open against a marble slab.

The school was a myth. There was, indeed, a board on the outside wall of the house, on which was painted "MISS PINKOTT'S" (the old and respectable name had been bought with the goodwill and the fixtures) —"MISS PINKOTT'S SEMINARY FOR YOUNG

LADIES," but inside all was ravening and wickedness.

Persecuted to fulfil his promise of marriage, the poor fellow went home for relief. Even then he was not in his right mind, as witness his conduct to that dear Miss Jenkins (the heiress) and to many old friends. If any man ever rode to his death he did so on that dismal November morning. He was driven either by madness or despair, and the wretch Pearl Herbert was his murderess.

* * * * *

We will now return to Miss Herbert's statement. Left joint executrix with her dead lover's mother, after having waited a reasonable time for her elder to take the initiative in the business of the will; she instructed her lawyer to arrange, through Mrs. Downing's lawyers, a personal interview between herself and that lady, "with

the object of arriving at a friendly arrangement." She had made up her mind not to accept the legacy. The dead had done quite enough for her without it, and she would not add pecuniary loss to the bereavement of an only son.

The reply came direct, and was such as a great lady (Mrs. Downing was the daughter of a peer) will sometimes permit herself to write to one she hates. Bad and bitter as was Baby Budd's tongue, I doubt if she could have deliberately spoken—much less written—such cruel words. The idea of "friendly arrangements" seemed to suggest weakness. The phrase was an unfortunate one, and provoked angry observation. How could any arrangement be friendly between a mother and the murderess of her child? How did Miss Herbert dare to suppose that such as she could be admitted into a gentle-

woman's house? How could she presume to think that the robbery she contemplated could be "arranged?" and so forth.

Poor Pearl, with true mourning in her heart, had put on black, and this was made the subject of heartless ridicule. The writer concluded by stating the will was invalid, and she would spend her last penny to prevent "a wicked adventuress from profiting by her infamy."

Making every allowance for a mother's wounded feelings, the letter was such as no woman should have written, and resulted in a further proof of what sort of clients people have who are their own lawyers. Pearl felt herself wronged and outraged. It was like firing upon a flag of truce. She took up the challenge, determined to claim her rights, if only to refute the calumnies of that cruel letter! And so the famous case

of *Downing v. Herbert and Others* came into court.

The issue was a simple one. Was young Downing *compos mentis* when he made that will? Was Miss Herbert's legacy obtained by undue influence? As the nature of the influence suggested might be deduced from the character of the persons interested, the public were treated to passages in the home life of Baby Budd upon the principle put forward once in these pages by Owen Hilyar, that as no one who fell into a river could escape getting wet, so no one who lived with a courtesan could be pure.

Now, owing to a hot temper, Baby Budd was unfortunate with her servants, two of whom (discharged) came forward, and were very serviceable to the plaintiff. They swore they had seen young Downing plied with drink by their mistress, and by Miss Herbert

as well. One of them deposed that she had heard him cry, "Let me out—I *will* go," that then came the sound of a scuffle, and Miss Herbert appeared with blood pouring from the side of her head. This story—intended to substantiate the charge of restraint—was made up of truth. Many times in his delirium Downing had yelled "Let me out—I will go." There had been several severe struggles with him, and Miss Herbert was undoubtedly wounded; but by a little alteration of time and place, and a few lies by way of cement, these truths were stuck together so as to make up a falsehood.

Upon cross-examination the composers of this mosaic were obliged to admit that Downing had broken open the sideboard, and that they had both often got him liquor from public-houses. Unfortunately for the "struggle" story, the hospital nurse was

present for the defendant, to state how she was wounded—for the tumbler had been flung in her presence. But even this worked both ways, as showing how very mad the testator must have been.

There was loose swearing on both sides. Mrs. Downing broke down badly. The old folks who kept the schoolhouse presented a lamentable spectacle. They wanted to be loyal to the old mistress whose bread they had eaten for so many years; and they wanted to be fair to Pearl, who had treated them kindly. They contradicted themselves and each other, and did her cause much harm, as under an absurd rule of our law you cannot correct the mistakes of your own witness.

Twelve witnesses were called by the plaintiff to prove that the testator was insane up to, and after, the date of his will; and nine deposed, for the defendant, to his perfect

sanity. If, taken one by one, the reasons given by the twelve for forming their opinion were to prevail; very few readers of this book should be out of a lunatic asylum. Massed together they had their effect. The nine could only say they had not noticed anything strange in Downing's conversation and manner, and that he appeared quite restored to health.

Negative evidence of this sort is always weak, and the case so far, was felt to be going in favour of the plaintiff, and might have ended so but for mistakes made by her counsel. In the first place being before a judge who worshipped respectability, and was wont to consider (and charge) that a want of virtue implied the absence of every other good quality, including veracity; he relied too much on Miss Herbert's assumed bad character. In the second he underrated his opponent, and made a speech which had

every good quality except that of disarming a reply.

The reply which came was quite unexpected. Pearl's counsel was justly esteemed as a sound lawyer, but as yet had no reputation for brilliant speaking. He took juries, as it were, by the button-hole, with a "Look here! this won't do" sort of manner, which had been effective in another class of cases, but would hardly serve in this. So the other side let off his rhetorical fireworks in the full belief that his learned friend would never be able to get through the smoke.

Mrs. Downing, as one of the twelve who spoke to the unhappy mental condition of her son, had given her evidence with a haughty firmness which delighted her friends until the cross-examination began. Haughty ladies are prone to state roundly as facts things which they consider to be true, or which *ought* to be true from their standpoint; and

this one shared the weakness indicated. I do not think she meant to mislead, but in the hands of a friendly examiner, and actuated by strong prejudice, she made several ugly slips.

This exhibition of virtue telling fibs was afterwards most adroitly employed against the theory of the plaintiff under which the evidence of Pearl was to be discredited. "If," said her counsel, "a woman is to be held untruthful because she is unchaste—if, according to my learned friend, the two sins are inseparable—what is to be said of the plaintiff who has been proved untruthful? That she is—no, gentlemen! I will not use the word in reference to a lady who is entitled to our sympathy, if not to our respect. I will not use it lightly of *any* woman, and I cast the wretched fallacy from me like a soiled rag."

As a whole, the summing up for the de-

fendant was criticized as follows by a member of the bar, who, it is only fair to say, was much struck with Pearl's beauty, and took a likeness of her from the back row.

"By Jove!" he said, "I didn't think Jack" (meaning the popular Q.C. under discussion), "had it in him. He was splendid. How he did pitch in! Old —— summed up like the devil against him, but he'd got the jury dead set, and it wasn't a bit of good."

In sober truth the jury were "out" for three hours before they returned a verdict establishing the will.

But what failed with those dozen men who had sworn to be guided by evidence alone, influenced that larger jury which is not bound by any oath, and cooks up facts to suit its palate. Old Pall Mall put his tongue in his cheek, and declared that Pearl Herbert "was a deuced clever woman." Young St. James'

yawned, and opined that "by Jove! a fellow had to be awfully careful." An enterprising photographer got hold of her likeness, and published it by the hundred. Baby Budd and Pearl Herbert were set side by side in every shop window devoted to celebrities, and so remained until a newer sensation shelved them out of sight.

Here Baby Budd falls out of this history. I am sorry that she had to be brought into it. For this; blame the state of civilization in which I live—not me. When such persons are spoken of by their pet names in drawing-rooms; when their sayings and doings are relished at afternoon teas; when their dresses are copied, and the auction is fashionably attended when the inevitable smash arrives—it is idle to ignore their existence, and the worst policy to hide the power that they wield, and the misery it inflicts.

CHAPTER III.

LEAVE HER ALONE.

JUDGE RANLETT was right. There had been a "muss" between brother and sister, having for its consequences the departure from Barwell of the former, and the utter mystification of the latter.

"If you would only tell me *why* you think we are wrong about her!" she urged, over and over again in various intonations, "you *must* have some reason, unless you have gone quite out of your mind."

But he would give no reasons; he would not even admit that he had any to give. Whether he was kept silent by wisdom or embarrassment, will never perhaps be known. He listened to all that Lady Pem had to say,

to urge, to entreat, and all she got was a dry, "It may be, but I'm not sure—I'm going to inquire—I will tell you some day."

"Why the deuce," said her lord, when appealed to, "can't you let the woman alone? I thought it was all settled. What is it to you who goes to the Gardens, so that they behave themselves when they're there? It isn't catching, is it?"

So Owen's brief holiday was broken up, and he went back to the slum, and Mr. Flowers, who unconsciously repeated the worldly wisdom preached by Lord Pembury—"Leave her alone." "You have," he said, "acted unwisely I think. You warned your friends of what she was—in general estimation—some years ago. So far you were right, and there you should have stopped. If they choose to investigate her subsequent conduct, they can do so. If

young Mr. Ranlett is really attached to her, he *will* do so, and find out the truth for himself. If he is not, no harm has been done. She has no part in your present life, and I must tell you that, in my opinion, you have acted most rashly. What was young Mr. Ranlett—whom you only knew for a day—to you? If Lord and Lady Pembury are under obligations to his family, surely you might have left them to repay the debt. Did it not occur to you that the woman might have turned the tables on you? I only wonder that she did not.”

“I almost wish she had,” Owen sighed. “I am more than willing to bear the penalty. It would be a comfort to me to suffer the punishment, and thus purge my sin.”

Mr. Flowers winced and bit his lip. “May it not be?” he asked, “that this painful condition of your mind is the very penance

awarded to you, and that this comfort for which you yearn is denied you for the good of your soul?"

This was quite a new proposition, and Owen had no answer ready.

"Besides," continued Mr. Flowers, "you have more than your own feelings to consider. You must think of your order. Imagine the scandal you might let loose! Think how the scoffers would triumph! You owe it to your Church to keep her free from stain."

"Then I should leave her."

"Tut, tut! You speak as though you—miserable worm that you are!—were the ruler of your destiny. Look back at your past, and judge how much of it you have ruled! If only four years ago some one had told you you were destined to become a Priest, and dedicate your life to work amongst

the poorest and most wretched of God's creatures, what would you have said? You would have laughed in his face. What you say now is as though the modelling tool in a sculptor's hand said, 'Master, throw me away, I am not fit for your purpose.' You know no more than that morsel of wood what the purpose of the great Master of all may be, but you have—or think you have—power to bring discredit on the means He employs. Fie upon such presumption! If your Church were a reality it would compel you to silence."

"Compel me!"

"Compel you; and rightly. If I see one in the act of committing a crime, have I not the right to restrain him by force—nay even to kill him if the life of another be threatened? I protest before Heaven that I would rather see you dead at my feet, than disgraced, and bringing the disgrace you talk

of so glibly as a 'comfort.' It is not only wicked of you, but foolish. You have seen this woman, whom you allow wrongfully to fill your mind, and heard from her in language which you say bears the stamp of truth, that she is not what you feared. You say it would be a consolation to believe that the story she told you is true. Why not believe it? It is more than possible. I do not blame her for telling you that it is unchristian to condemn upon mere worldly probabilities. Accept the consolation she offers, cast from you the burden that is oppressing your mind and unfitting it for its proper work. Leave her alone."

Thus the man whose influence usually swayed him as the wind does a bulrush; who could make a Monk or a Mormon of him if he chose; but who in a case with a woman in it was sailing an unknown sea without chart or

compass. For the first time since their lives were united Hilyar listened doubtingly to his friend's advice, saw through the sophistries upon which it was based, and determined not to take it—or at any rate that part of it epitomised in "*Leave her alone.*" He had hoped for Mr. Flowers' assistance in his quest. Well, he would have to follow it alone—but where to begin?

The reader has got what he knows about Pearl Herbert piecemeal—as would, I think, be the case with regard to any person in whom he might become interested. I am telling her story as it became known to those who are mixed up in, and affected by, it. It is their story as well. The history of a nation, or of a hero or a housemaid, is a mosaic of scraps gathered here and there at different times, and from various sources. Do you ever reflect when you read the smoothly

running sentences of Macaulay or Froude that it may have cost them ten days of careful search or hard reading, to write as many lines? A story is not like a picture, to be presented for public view only after it is finished, and varnished, and framed, and hung up in a suitable light. The reader begins with the charcoal sketch, and watches every process under which it takes colour and expression; sees details filled in; notes the correction of false lines—for the men and women we deal with are not lay figures to be stuck into a pose and keep it—and when the last touch is put, and *Finis* written, there is an end of it. We close the book at the point where we begin to look at the picture.

The reader knows as much as any of the persons about whom he is reading know, of what is going on. They only know what has come to their individual knowledge, and

their actions must, if you please, be judged accordingly. This must be remembered with regard to Owen Hilyar. He had read extracts only from the trial *Downing v. Herbert*, and certain leading articles upon the case in which the writer—after admitting that the verdict was the only one possible under the circumstances, and that judge and jury and defendant were absolutely right in all they had done; proceeded—as is usual—to show that the whole thing was radically wrong, and denoted a lamentable condition of morality which if not corrected would ruin the country next week. He had seen how his class took its cue from these instructions; condemned Pearl, and spoke plaintively of that “poor, dear Mrs. Downing,” who had been so badly treated by the rascally lawyers. In the position which his class had placed Pearl, he concluded that she would continue, and had

remained. He knew nothing of Mrs. Downing's letter; nothing of the defence side of the trial it necessitated; nothing of the Marshalls—in short nothing favourable; and his morbid imagination focussed every cruel conjecture into a reality. We know how this phantasmagoria affected his mind, and the amount of light which has broken in upon it.

The Ranletts—father and son—know all that can be said against Pearl and have not heard her in her defence as Owen has; but being thinkers, they have a great advantage over him. The professional training of the Judge shows him exactly where to begin in his search for the truth.

Hilyar had been absent from his duties for only four whole days, but found plenty of work to distract his attention from the question that was puzzling him. Let the new coachman be just as good a whip as the one

whose place he takes, the team will not jog along smoothly till he has got the reins in hand, and pulled them together. In this instance we have the regular driver resuming his seat before his *locum tenens* had well settled down into it; and consequently the inconveniences of transition were doubled.

But for any small vexations which arose out of this, Hilyar was amply compensated by the warmth of the welcome he received. Sallow sullen faces brightened up as he passed on his errands of lovingkindness. Men and women who had shunned, or scowled at him, upon general principles, when he first came amongst them, and would probably have gone on doing so sooner than admit their mistake, took advantage of the break which made a new start possible. On the first Sunday after his return, the church was crowded with the sort of worshippers he

loved to see. He never preached better. He went down into the folly and wickedness of their everyday lives, with a tenderness which disarmed resentment. He reproved without affronting; he hit hard, but every blow was a fair one. Above all he did not fall into the mistake of talking about what he did not understand. I once heard an excellent sermon preached *for* sailors *to* sailors at a great seaport, and overheard the following criticism of it by two mariners, behind whom I walked in the street, returning from the church—

“Did ye hear, Bill,” said one, “what the —— soldier said about hoisting our sheets to catch the breeze.”

“Oh *he* ain’t no account,” said the other, and so they dismissed the subject. All that was right, and eloquent, and good was upset and nullified by the technical slip which con-

founded a sail with the rope that sets it. Hilyar's congregation was composed of furnace hands from glass and gas works, foundry men, tanners, dyers, and the heterogeneous class which get a living on the river-side. When he ventured a simile or allusion drawn from their callings, it was a correct one, and went straight to its mark.

His reception at the schools that night, shook his sensitive nature to the core. He saw that his people had begun to love him. The little break in his labours was good for him also. "A watched pot"—says the proverb—"never boils." There is nothing like leaving your work, and coming back to it with freshened eyes, for truly recognising its faults, or realizing how well it has got on. Owen Hilyar became almost happy in the contemplation of his. The places on which he sowed his Master's seed were no longer

of the rocks. His fear lest the spikelets of green that he had left appearing here and there, might turn out to be rank weeds after all, was removed. Not here and there only, but in great, healthy masses, growing and spreading; he found what in God's harvest time would be the golden corn.

Thus far he admitted to himself that Father Florian (otherwise Mr. Flowers) was right. The work whereof he was the instrument was blessed, and prospered. He had put his hand to the plough, and might not look back.

Cautiously feeling his way towards what he desired to ascertain about Pearl Herbert, he found out with mingled surprise and pleasure that such of his world as he met at his club had forgotten all about her. Even the gentleman who had been junior counsel for the plaintiff in *Downing v. Herbert*, and

who posed for an authority on all society and demi-mundane subjects, when asked what was his real opinion of the defendant, knit his brows, said "Let me see," and not seeing, asked if it wasn't a horse case. Other and more pointed questioning produced no clearer result. Even the photograph shops gave an uncertain sound. Yes—they might have had a likeness of the lady; what was she? a professional beauty, or an actress? They hadn't one left. They supposed she hadn't "taken" sufficiently to call for a second edition.

This was most reassuring. At one time he used to imagine that any one who looked at him as he passed in the street was saying to himself, "Ah! there goes the man who is responsible for that wicked wretch—Pearl Herbert's—doings." He expected now to see the faces of the worldly wise change at the

mention of her name. A few of them remembered that there was something about such a woman some years ago, but could not remember what it was—were not even certain that whatever it might have been was bad.

She had evidently, therefore, not acquired a new notoriety; and the old one was dying out, if not already dead. Might he not, therefore, take Father Florian's advice, believe the story she had told him, be comforted, and—*leave her alone*? He did believe her story—his former friend Mr. Bridges reluctantly confirmed one important part of it, and he could hear nothing to throw doubt on the rest. He drew immense comfort from this belief, and thus two points out of *the* three were granted, but the third—*leave her alone*! That was not to be conceded. Why, the very fact of his having formed a good opinion of her, demanded that he should

retract and atone for his mistaken bad one. Besides this feeling, which he thought was the mainspring of his actions, there was another—vague and dim at present—which made him desire to see her once again.

So the light increased. The outlines of his phantom became blurred, fell apart, and melted away like a dissolving view. Something of quite a different aspect was taking its place slowly and dimly. He was enjoying the physical elation of deserved success, and on the height to which it raised him, had his moral pulses stirred by an atmosphere as invigorating as that which sent the blood into his haggard face the day when he stood in prayer on the Derbyshire Torr.

So his visit to Barwell was not a fiasco after all. Moreover other things were going well in the slum. Its business brightened up, and wages rose. You must know the

poor as he knew them, before you can realize the effect of the few shillings a week which stand between sullen discontent and wholesome grumbling. I call grumbling "wholesome" in this sense—that unless some one had grumbled at his dug-out canoe, we should never have had a Cunard steamboat. Nor was this all. On the verge of his parish stood some large works that had been closed for the past three months, which meant that the bread-winners of some two hundred families were out of employment. Passing by one morning he was delighted to find the big black gates open, and a swarm of bricklayers and masons adding to the already extensive premises. He made inquiry and found that the works would be reopened shortly under a new management, and that the name of the new manager was one George Marshall.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE IS SAFE—POOR CHILD!

THE Rev. Owen Hilyar took an early opportunity of calling upon the new manager of the Albert Glass Works to feel his pulse about schools. His reception was not encouraging. He found George Marshall standing with his card in his hand, and an expression on his face for which he was not prepared. Those who go on such errands are prepared for several expressions. There is the blustering "Come, it's no use bothering me" expression; the super-polite, "Anything in the world to oblige you—except money" expression; the resigned "Well, I suppose I must give you some-

thing” expression ; and others, to which the one in question bore no sort of resemblance. It was full of anger and surprise. But those who go on such errands must not be easily abashed. Owen stated his case, its prospects, its wants, and had the satisfaction of seeing the anger die away, though the surprise seemed to increase.

“No one,” Marshall said, “knows better than I do the worth of knowledge. A working man who can read and write has an extra pair of hands. But I’m all in confusion here now, and haven’t time to think about it. I’ll see you some other day, Mr. Hilyar. Perhaps we shall know and understand each other better then.”

All this passed standing. No chair had been offered, no hand extended. Owen left the office with an impression that there was something more than met the ear in those

last words, and that he had seen the speaker before—somewhere.

As he passed out of the gate, musing ; he nearly walked over a little girl who was entering in a great hurry. He had got as far as —“ Oh, I am so sorry ! I hope ”—when the child looked up in his face with a smile, and said—

“ Why you're *his* friend ! ”

“ Whose friend, dear ? ”

“ You *are* ! Don't you remember that day at Barwell, when you and Mr. René met Auntie and me in the Dell, and she was so ill ? ”

“ I do, indeed,” he replied ; “ but what are you doing here alone, my child ? ”

“ Oh, I'm not alone, Auntie's coming. I always run on in front to see papa first. Here he is ! Papa, papa ! ” she cried, as George Marshall crossed the yard, and scampered after him.

Before Hilyar had time to turn, he was face to face with Pearl Herbert.

"Thank God for this," he whispered. "Oh, Pearl, if you can—greet me so that"—She seized his idea in an instant, and bowed. "I have so much to tell you, I don't know where to begin," he said, as he raised his hat. "May I see you again? May I call where you live?"

"For what purpose?"

"To say that I believe every word of what you told me that night. To beg you most humbly to forgive me for the mad wicked words I spoke. Oh, Pearl! You sent for me, and I obeyed you in mortal anguish; give me another hearing? Let me tell you all, and hear you say I am forgiven."

"I can say so now," she replied wearily; "let that suffice, and end it."

"Ah, *say* so, but not feel so. You cannot

forgive me as I hope to be forgiven unless you know more, much more of what I have done and suffered. Be generous—be just.”

“Just!” she repeated.

“You told me that night I had changed, that I was not the man you expected to see. I—with blinded eyes and poisoned mind—saw the creature of a thousand horrid dreams, not you. We have never met as we are, to know each other, since.”

In his excitement he began to speak loudly, and she stopped him with a gesture.

“This is no place for such a discussion,” she said, and her steady eyes fell for the first time. “I will consider. Tell me one thing, have you seen Mr. Marshall?”

“I have.”

“Did you come here to ask after me?”

“No. Our meeting is purely accidental..

"This is the last place I should think of to seek you in."

"Mr. Marshall and his wife are my best and truest friends. I have been living with them for the last two years—did you know that?"

"I did not."

"Mr. Marshall was once a brickmaker at Beckhampton. I used to teach his wife before my poor mother died. When the people in the court at Stafford hooted me on the first day of the trial, before my side was heard, he recognised me, and was the only one to take my part. I might have been as bad as they tried to make me out for all he knew, but he was fair and just. He did not condemn me unheard. I told him my story—all of it, and his answer was to give me a home with his wife and child."

"You are piling coals of fire on my head."

“ I do not wish to wound you. I desire only to explain my present position. I shall consult these dear friends as to whether I should see you again for the purpose of a full and *final* explanation, and, if they consent, it shall be made.”

The word “*final*” was pronounced with chilling emphasis. Owen looked up, and wondered. Could this beautiful woman with the steadfast eyes, and resolute voice, have ever been the timid child he once foredoomed as one who had to fall? He stammered his thanks for a concession which now appeared to be the best he could hope for, and perceiving that Mab and her father were approaching, took a hurried and incoherent leave.

This happened on a Tuesday ; on the following Friday he received at his lodgings in Arlington Street (which he occupied jointly

with Mr. Flowers), two letters—one of them with “ALBERT GLASS WORKS” printed on the envelope. This he tore open eagerly, and read as follows:—

“September 21st.

“SIR,—

“I have made inquiries as to the manner in which the schools of which you spoke to me on the 19th instant are conducted, and beg to contribute £25 (twenty-five pounds) to this good work. A lady whose almoner I am in such matters, wishes to add £50 (fifty pounds). Enclosed please find cheques for the above amounts, which being made payable to your order, will not require a receipt.

“I am, sir,

“Your obedient servant,

“GEORGE MARSHALL.”

Not a word about a meeting and a broad hint—to anyone else—that no reply was required. Well, there was some consolation in it after all. His labours were appreciated. The “lady” of the fifty pounds was Pearl beyond a doubt, and this was the way she used her money!

“Whose almoner I am in such matters!” Was this an expression which a self-educated ex-brickmaker would be likely to use? He thought not, though the rest of the letter was not in a lady’s style. She had evidently dictated that one line, and the remainder, although dated from the works, might have been written at home. Perhaps she read it. As this thought came, he raised the paper to his lips, and kissed it where it might have been touched by her hand.

“Yes,” he thought, “all things are going well with me. She will soon know that more

than my face has changed. Already she seems inclined to forget the latter wrong I have done her—if I could only hear her say that the first was forgiven! If by some blessed interposition she too might be moved to work amongst the poor, and be her own almoner, with her angel's face telling of obloquy and scorn bravely borne, and lived down! using her wealth with the knowledge of one who had starved in the street!—what a power would be hers! If she would let me labour at her side, what a power would be mine! Why, she had begun already! Busy George Marshall would not have so promptly inquired and given so generously, but for her. Who knows but what she has been investigating for herself? As for a receipt not being required, that really comes to nothing when properly considered. Why is it almost an invitation to write an informal acknow-

ledgment of her most liberal and welcome gift ! Of course I must write an acknowledgment, and that will bring her answer about a meeting. When my explanation is made, she will know me as I *am*, will respect, and therefore believe me ; may perhaps—Heaven grant it ! forgive me, and if she, with all her wrongs, does that, I will believe that God's judgment is passed from her lips. Then I can continue in the ministry without compunction—then indeed I may be comforted."

As he sat building these castles in the air with the other letter unopened before him, the old morbid desire for penance flitted across the horizon of his thoughts in such a shape that he began to wonder why he had ever entertained it. In the warm light of hope that was dawning, it appeared weak, selfish, even *wicked*.

Father Florian was right. His real punishment had been to yearn for one which God in His wisdom and His mercy had withheld; and thus, the true penalty had been endured! Fool that he had been to forget that he could not stand self-accused before men without inflicting further misery upon poor innocent Pearl. What possible right had he to think of dragging her down with him?

Upon reflection he remembered that this thought belonged to the time when he had convinced himself that she deserved such treatment, and that it was his *duty* to inflict it as a means of checking her career of (supposed) infamy. That time had passed away, and the utter destruction of one of its creations swept the others away with it as the fall of a beam in some tottering structure might bring the whole building down in ruins.

I am much to blame if this appears to you as a sudden or inconsistent change. Its key-note was struck in the cry, "Oh, Pearl! if this be true!" and in the harmony that followed there is not, I think, one false cadence. He is as sanguine now, as he was despondent in the past. He is sanguine now *because* he was despondent in the past. In our lives, as in our pictures, the shadows lighten the lights, and the lights deepen the shadows. He has emerged from the shadow and stands in the light, which naturally he takes to be far more brilliant than it really is.

As his eyes become accustomed to it, he finds this out and worries—it was his nature to seek for trouble and find it. He used to be vexed with his new bishop for refusing to hear his confession—now he is vexed with himself for having made one to his old bishop. Several of his ideas respecting con-

fession in the abstract are shaken by this illustration of how it may affect third persons. He sums up the number of the *convives* who used to sit down to those little suppers to which Pearl had referred, and finds with satisfaction that Mr. Bridges is the only one who could do mischief—mischief to Pearl. Of the others, one is dead, another is a barrister practising at Calcutta, and a third was always so shortsighted, that he would pass his own brother in the street without recognising him. Mr. Bridges alone had identified Pearl Herbert with the lady who was called “Mrs. Hilyar” in those days; and Mr. Bridges was a prudent man who might easily be kept silent for his own sake, now that Miss Herbert had defenders.

“Yes,” he said aloud, as though in answer to a question, “she is safe—poor child! God keep her so.”

Then his eye fell on the other letter. He opened it and read :—

“ Langham Hotel, September 21st.

“ SIR,—

“ I propose calling on you to-morrow at noon, on a subject of importance.

“ Respectfully,

“ HIRAM P. RANLETT.”

He looked at the clock and found that he had passed three hours in thought. The hands were on the stroke of twelve.

CHAPTER V.

"THE HORRID TRUTH."

PUNCTUAL to the moment, Judge Ranlett arrived, and Owen's heart sank as he declined his proffered hand.

"Presently, sir," said his visitor, "if at all. My object in seeking this interview is to speak with you about Miss Pearl Herbert. Do you object to hear me, or have I to go elsewhere for the information I seek?"

"I will hear you," Hilyar replied, with a dreadful presentiment of pain. "After what I told your son I owe you—I have myself been making inquiries, and"—

"It will be best, perhaps, for me to begin," the Judge interrupted, "and let you know what I have been told elsewhere. If it be

untrue, you can correct it; if it be incomplete, you can supply the deficiencies.

“My son made the acquaintance of Miss Herbert at Barwell, and when they had become quite good friends you warned him against her, naming a notorious woman with whom she had associated, and a trial-at-law in which she had figured—as you intimated—discreditably. Your sister, Lady Pembury, endeavoured to have her expelled from the public gardens, and I understand that upon this occasion you repeated an admission (made previously in my presence) that you might have made a mistake. Thus far I think there will be no dispute.”

“None.”

“For my son’s sake—his feelings are too much engaged to allow of his judging coolly for himself—I undertook to obtain a full and true history of Miss Herbert. I have

read the shorthand-writers' notes of the case *Downing v. Herbert*, and got from them several clues to further investigation. I have seen the woman you meant, whose real name is Mary Forbes, and she has told me a story so *horrible* that for the credit of human nature I am afraid to believe it can be true. She tells me of a young girl, barely seventeen years of age, who was left alone in the world penniless, by the death of her mother, and was taken charge of by a lady—a real neighbour—who loved her as she had loved her dead mother, and intended to befriend her in the best of all ways—by making her independent.

“She tells me—does Mary Forbes—that this lady had a son who took upon himself to manage the business affairs of that poor child—for child she was in all worldly ways, having never left her mother's side—and to

prepare her for working her own way, and getting her own living; and that in doing so he was hard and even rough with her for her good (as he said) which made her afraid of him, and obedient to everything he told her, as though he were a stern father. I am told that this was a sham to bend her mind and subdue her will, and that not even the shelter of his own mother's roof protected the orphan from his designs—coolly laid, long-planned—designs of infamy. He imagined a family in London who wanted a governess. He got a person (now in gaol for another forgery) to write letters in the lady's name to his mother in answer to an advertisement she had published on behalf of her charge. He pretended to make inquiries about these people, and to find that they were highly respectable. The engagement was made, and he was trusted to escort the girl to her

situation. Just think of it ! The girl going out—gratefully, trustingly, with a brave heart behind her tears, and ignorant of the very existence of shame—to fight the battle of life, and by her side, as her protector ! the man who for weeks and weeks in cold blood had provided for her ruin !

“I need not say what followed. He covered her with a cloud of lies—he, whom she had learned to obey like a god ! She was utterly at his mercy, and he was merciless. But with all this, her woman’s instinct might—no, *would* have defeated him if he had left her her senses. He drugged her, sir ! He committed a crime against that poor child which in my country would have sent him to the gallows.

“That is the story told to me by a bad woman, with oaths and hot tears of indignation. I would not believe it without some

better proof than her word, and so I have come to you to ask that one question—*can* it be true?"

He saw the answer in the livid face before him.

"The girl," Ranlett continued, "thus most infamously betrayed was Pearl Herbert. You were the man."

"I was," said Hilyar, in a hoarse whisper. "It is the horrid truth, except that I meant well at first. I was hard with her, really for her good. It was so difficult to make her understand her position. One piteous little glance undid it all, and let the beast and the devil into me."

"And having done her such cruel wrong you took up the first stone against her!"

"On account of her subsequent life," cried Hilyar. "She had associated"—

"Hush! I know what you are going

to say; but, my God, man! do you ever *think*? If you were drowning in the midst of the Atlantic Ocean and a putrid corpse came floating by, would you not clutch at it for support? What would you think of those who, when by a miracle you were saved, gave out that you *associated* with putrid corpses? Did you ever inquire into her subsequent life, as you call it? Did you ask yourself what was to become of her when she sent you back the money you had offered to buy back your sworn promises?"

"She left me no clue," Hilyar moaned. "She said she would never see or hear from me again."

"Did you *try* to find her—answer me that?"

"I was preparing for a new life. I had to forget her."

“*You had to forget her!*” the Judge repeated with sovereign contempt. “Yes, I suppose you *had*. Now let me tell you what I have found out, without any difficulty, about her *subsequent life*. She got a real engagement as governess on the strength of those letters you made your mother write; and when your friend—whose neck ought to be wrung for it—gave her away to her employers, she was again left destitute. She was found starving in the streets of London by Mary Forbes. I have seen the doctor who attended her that night, and afterwards, till she recovered sufficiently to be sent to the seaside. I have seen the people she lodged with there—at Brighton. I have seen the woman who nursed young Downing. I can account, if needs be, for every hour she spent in Forbes’ house or under her care, and I can satisfy any reasonable human being that she

had not even the *chance* of doing wrong. For myself, I know she led a good life."

"I believe so now, from my heart I believe it; but I was misled by the trial," pleaded the guilt-stricken man.

"Why, the verdict was in her favour!"

"Yes, but the moral inferences seemed so strong."

"There wasn't a moral inference in it," exclaimed Ranlett. "There was a vindictive old cat belonging to the aristocracy, who lied on one side, and a friendless girl, under a cloud, on the other. So you and your class jumped at conclusions of their own, which you dignify by the name of *inferences*, that the girl was to blame. You had to have a scapegoat, and the old cat wouldn't do. I have read that trial, every word of it. I am a lawyer of nearly forty years' standing, and I say deliberately that it did not leave a

shadow of blame upon Pearl Herbert. I would give a hundred dollars to have heard her counsel's speech, and a thousand to have made it myself. By God, sir!” (here the old Judge's excitement got the better of him, and sent him straddling up and down the room)—“I'd have been proud of it, and I hope to tell him so some day. He took up their case and skinned it alive. He didn't leave a square inch of hide on it, or the old cat that made it. He squelched the life out of it. He broke every bone in its miserable body, and then he ripped out its entrails and flung them in their faces! This,” he continued, after having taken a few straddles in silence to cool down, “this is the case you wished my son to read, that he might be set against Miss Herbert, two years after it had been tried, during all which time she had been living a life above the very shadow of reproach.”

"I did not know." Many times had Hilyar interposed this same pitiful plea, as the withering stream drawn from the past flowed over him, scorching his brain, and choking every other utterance. Not one accusing word was lost upon him, but louder, clearer, more intensely bitter than the bitterest of them all there rang in his ears the echo of Pearl's own reproach—"You have judged me like a fool! I would not have beaten a dog upon the grounds you have held sufficient to degrade me."

"There is some excuse," the Judge continued, "for chatterers who didn't care to learn, but you were the man who ought to have *known*. Now what I want to understand clearly is this—have you hugged your wilful ignorance as an excuse for not doing justice; or have you been going on, as you think justly, under a mistake? No, don't answer now. Let me put myself fully on

record, and we shall get sooner to the end. I haven't said a word about your going into the Church, and what you have done as a clergyman—particularly lately. I give you credit for sincerity in all that, and respect you so far. From what you said to my son René at Barwell, and to your sister, I am inclined to think that you may have been sincere in the other matter—blindly, stupidly sincere, mind you ! but still sincere.”

“ I was—as Heaven is my judge. I thought I was doing right. That very night on which it was pretended I lost myself, I saw Pearl—saw Miss Herbert. I went prepared to threaten her with further disclosures ; to compel her to leave the place. I did so with the full knowledge that she might, and the expectation that she *would*, retaliate and ruin me. Can I give you a greater proof of sincerity than that ? ”

“ I will tell you by-and-bye—well ? ”

"I accused and upbraided her, but left her presence self-condemned. There is truth in the very sound of her voice. This is why I said I thought I might be wrong. I would like to see your son and say I *know* I am."

"I do not think," said the Judge drily, "that he requires your personal assurance on that point."

"Your information is wonderfully complete," Owen replied. "I thank you for it, but you must allow me to say on my part that I was as fully convinced of her innocence before you came in as I am now."

"By the same process which assured you of her guilt—guess-work."

"Mr. Ranlett, I am not a lawyer or a detective; I have not your advantages. I have satisfied myself in my own way—let that suffice. I have seen Miss Herbert lately, and I believe she will give me an opportunity

of obtaining her forgiveness, or at any rate, of imploring it, upon a full retraction of all I have said or thought against her.”

“Is that all?”

“What else can I do?”

As Hilyar asked this question, the door of the back room was opened slowly and Mr. Flowers entered. The Judge had jumped up and got so far as “Why, good God man!” before he perceived that they were no longer alone. Mr. Flowers had a noiseless step. He gave quite a natural start when he saw the stranger, but something told Owen that he had been listening.

“This, Judge Ranlett,” said the latter, “is my dearest friend, Mr. Flowers. I have no secrets from him. He knows every part of my life, and I shall tell him what has passed between us to-day. You may speak in his presence precisely as though we were alone.”

“Then,” said the Judge, “I will tell you that I am shocked at the question you just put—*What else can you do?* You have betrayed an innocent girl. You have traduced her when, in spite of you, she was leading an honest life. You think you can square it all up by getting her forgiveness, and ask what more you can do? Now let me tell you. In my country a villain who had acted thus—parson or no parson—would be given this choice: to marry her, or be shot at sight like a mad dog. A *man* who was sincere—as you pretend to be—in owning his crime and wishing to atone for it would require no such compulsion, nor would he ask what else he could do.”

At the words *marry her* a great trembling fell upon Owen Hilyar. Mr. Flowers made him an unnecessary sign to be silent (he

could not have replied to save his life) and said blandly—

“This relates, I presume, to Miss Herbert. May I venture to ask what relationship you bear to her?”

“No relationship at all, sir,” the Judge replied.

“Ah! I see, an old friend of the family. She is fortunate in having so warm an advocate; but, my dear sir, we are not in the habit of shooting at sight here. If we do, they call it murder, and hang us.”

“There are other crimes besides murder, sir, for which you ought to hang.”

“Possibly; but do not let us get upon abstract propositions. Am I to understand that you are authorised by Miss Herbert to accept an offer of marriage from our friend here?”

“No, sir,” said the Judge warmly, “you

are not to understand anything of the sort. I told your friend just now that I would show him how he could prove his sincerity; and I've done so."

"He is, I am sure, deeply indebted to you for your kindness. Am I right in assuming that Mr. René Ranlett is your son?" asked Flowers.

"He is. What do you deduce from that?"

"The great interest you both feel in this lady," Mr. Flowers replied. "Your son has constituted himself her champion, and you are anxious to see her married to another gentleman."

"I'd sooner see her in her grave," cried the Judge, losing his temper, "than the wife of that white-livered scoundrel. If she be the woman I take her for, she'd die first; but he has had the chance of showing that he isn't root and branch a fraud, and he has"—

“Hush!” gasped Owen, staggering from his chair, “hush! for your own sake. You have misjudged me. This is not hesitation. Your words stunned me, that is all. I have not dared to think of such an end. Do not say that it cannot be.”

“Hush, yourself!” said Flowers in an angry whisper. “You don’t know what you are saying.”

“I do; and I say that I would give up all the rest of my life for one moment in which I might hold Pearl Herbert’s hand in mine and call her wife.”

“Oh! this is raving,” Flowers interposed. “He has overworked himself; his mind”—

“Is clear as a bell,” said Owen with heightened colour and brightened eyes, “on this.”

“Sure?” asked the Judge doubtfully.

“Try me,” said Owen Hilyar.

CHAPTER VI.

DIPLOMACY.

HILYAR followed Judge Ranlett into the passage, and, as he opened the hall door, whispered—

“Whatever may happen, spare *her*. If you want to punish me, make out the story in some other name, and I will plead guilty. I will resign my parish, leave the country, do anything sooner than have Pearl’s name dragged up again. Only a few moments before you came in I was rejoicing in the thought that she was forgotten and safe, and now” (bitterly) “you have revived the scandal.”

“No, sir,” said the Judge, “I have acquired weapons which shall kill it if any

one dares to revive it. I am speaking of the Downing part. That is what I have done, and it *had* to be done sooner or later, for that poor lady's peace. As for the other—Mary Forbes would cut her right hand off sooner than hurt her. She told me, and I shall tell my son, and there it ends. Good-day, sir.”

Owen returned to his room, and through the open door saw Mr. Flowers in the act of packing a portmanteau.

“Yes,” the latter replied to his question, “I am going somewhere. I am going, in the first place, to your sister ; then, if necessary, I shall go to your father and mother, and any other sane members of your family, to see what they can do with you.”

Owen tried to laugh.

“*My* influence,” Flowers continued, “is clearly at an end. I advised you to leave

this woman alone; you seek her out, take money from her, and arrange for interviews! Yes, I heard you, and I saw the letter on your table. You know what my feelings are about a married priesthood, and you are going to let yourself be bullied into asking a woman like this to be your wife! This is what has made you so unusually bright and cheerful during the last ten days or so. I —your friend, the man you say you trust— thought you were following my counsels; that you had cast this foulness from your mind for ever; and I rejoiced. But you were playing with me. You had returned like a dog to your vomit, and you were chuckling in your sleeve how nicely you had deceived that old fool Flowers."

"If I have been more cheerful lately," Owen replied calmly, "it is because a great weight has been taken from my heart. You

bade me find consolation in a guess. Was that conscientious advice, my friend? Was it advice which one who had placed himself in the wrong, and tortured himself through guessing, could be expected to take? I am now consoled by fact."

"And condemned."

"I have judged like a fool. She told me so in as many words; and she was right. I would rather stand in the market place with that condemnation written over my head, than endure the agony I bore whilst thinking I had judged correctly. Now respecting marriage"—

"I will not hear a word," Flowers interrupted vehemently, "except that you were not in command of your senses when you entertained the thought of it."

"I think I never had my perfect senses till I did. As long as I misjudged

Pearl Herbert, it could not have come into my mind. When I knew that I had wronged her, my utmost hope was to get her pardon. The possibility of making reparation never occurred to me till Judge Ranlett spoke."

"You will be better in a day or two," Mr. Flowers replied, strapping his portmanteau, "particularly if you are left alone. May I trouble you to ring the bell? I wish to send for a cab."

"Do not let us part in anger, Flowers."

"Anger! Pray do not dignify what I feel about you, by supposing it to be *anger*. I leave you to feel that for yourself when Judge Ranlett's pistol is no longer at your head, and you recover your senses. Will you ring the bell, or stand aside and let me do so for myself."

"One moment. If you say anything about this to my sister, you will have to tell her

-all. Why inflict this pain and disgrace upon us so hastily, perhaps so unnecessarily? Wait! It is not like you, my more than brother, to be so hasty. Wait and see if Miss Herbert will allow me to make the reparation I offer. Perhaps she will not, I hardly dare hope she will."

"Pshaw! She refuse! Why did she send for you at Barwell—why did she follow you here? Why did she employ that man—of course she employed him!—to bully you? And why does he do her work? It is all as clear as the sun at noon day. She has money, and wants position—he has a son and wants to keep him from a *misalliance*. Their mine is charged, the match is burning, and you ask the only man who can save you from destruction to *wait*."

"I accept your figure," Owen replied, "I am standing over such a mine, and you pro-

pose to save me by cutting my throat ! Now let us talk prose. Miss Herbert sent for me at Barwell to threaten the exposure to my family which you are so anxious to make, but she thought better of it. She came to London with her friends, the Marshalls, with whom she has been living for the last two years. You told me in this very room not a fortnight ago that if young Mr. Ranlett were interested in her he could make inquiries. He has done so through his father, who—if he be the man you take him for—would have made a bad report, and so gained his end directly. As for being bullied, as you say, I hope that when you are calmer, you will regret the use of such a word."

"Well, I do," said Flowers, uneasily.

For the first time in his manhood he had lost his temper—and about a woman ! It began to dawn upon him that he was in con-

flict with a power he did not understand—a power that was giving strength against him, and enfeebling his own assaults.

“Will you see Lady Pembury yourself?” he asked, “and be guided by her?”

“I will be guided by my conscience.”

“And not listen to reason?”

“I cannot listen to her reasoning without giving my own.”

“You must give them sooner or later.”

“I think not, unless you force me. I have ascertained that the scandals once public against Miss Herbert are unfounded, and I ask her to become my wife. She is my equal in birth and education, more than my equal in fortune, which is the only drawback. Nothing more need be said.”

“May I present it to your sister on this basis, and leave her to discuss it with you?”

“You may, and I shall say to her as to you just now—wait.”

So Mr. Flowers went to Hadlow arranging in his mind how he could most strongly influence Lady Pem without telling her the worst, and how that worst should be employed if he were driven to use it.

He found the task of rehabilitating a woman in a woman's eyes no easy one.

Lady Pem fought long and bravely for her cherished hatred of Pearl, and declared she would never forgive Judge Ranlett. She, however, allowed herself to be persuaded that it was her best policy to seem as though she accepted the justification, and to remain upon their usual good terms with the justifier.

“It's no use throwing mud,” Mr. Flowers argued, “he” (meaning Owen), “will marry her if only to wipe it off.”

“I am afraid you are right,” said Lady

Pem, with a deep sigh. "Conscientious lunacy runs in our family. I had a grandfather who would not be Governor-General of India because he disapproved of the prime minister's wife. My elder brother could have the Queen's yacht if he liked, but he prefers pottering about the Cannibal Islands on fifteen shillings a day. Owen gave up a lovely place, worth, with the house and land, fully a thousand a year, for that dreadful London parish, and a quarter of the money; and now he wants to marry a woman because he thinks he has wronged her! It's in the blood, but we've never had two idiots at once till now. Why, good heavens! if every man who has wronged her in that way had to marry her, she'd have as many husbands as Solomon had wives."

"One would be enough for our purpose," insinuated Flowers. "Why shouldn't we

fight this crafty old American with his own weapons, pit his son against your brother, and so treat the woman that he can make no objection to her as a daughter-in-law ; or, if he does, that the young man will marry her in spite of him. He would suit her better than my poor friend ; handsomer, more cheerful, in better health, richer, and above all, he could take her to a country where she is not known. Depend upon it, that we have only to bring René Ranlett forward for Owen Hilyar to be sent about his business.”

“ Capital ! The Ranletts will be here on the 24th. I invited them when we were at Barwell.”

“ Put them off for a week, and have Owen down instead. Get him out of the way and force the other man in it.”

“ Would Owen come ? ”

“ If your ladyship would write him such a

letter as I could—suggest,” Mr. Flowers humbly insinuated, “I feel almost sure he would.”

Amongst the contents of the post bag of Hadlow Hall that night were the following three letters in Lady Pem’s free and dashing penmanship:—

“Hadlow Hall,

“September 20th.

“DEAR OWEN,

“Flowers is here in a great state about your wanting to marry any one. I think a wife would be the salvation of you. The only thing is, can you satisfy papa and mamma that you are right about Pearl? I am sure they would be delighted if you could, for her sake, as they were so fond of her. For myself I must admit that I am coming round to your opinion, and if I could quite adopt it, there is nothing I would not do for

the poor girl. Let us have a long talk about it. We can have you on the 24th till the following Saturday, and if all go well I will call upon her when we come to town in November, and make things pleasant all round.

“Your affectionate sister,

“CLAIRE PEMBURY.”

“Hadlow Hall,

“September 20th.

“MY DEAR MR. RANLETT,

“Apropos of the unpleasant circumstances under which Miss Herbert’s name was mentioned at Barwell when I had the pleasure of meeting you there. I am in justice bound to say that the result of inquiries I have made, convinces me that I was labouring under a mistake. There had been indeed a sad scandal about the poor dear girl of whom we were all once so fond, but upon investi

gation it turns out to be unfounded. So please forgive me if I hurt your feelings. I cannot, of course, say anything to Miss Herbert on this painful subject, but when I come back to London I shall do my best to renew an old friendship as though nothing had happened. Now comes a subject upon which I ought to write to your father, but I really have not time for another letter. I have made a mistake about the 24th, and must beg you to postpone your visit till the 1st October. This will give you the cream of the pleasant shooting. With our united kind regards, Believe me,

“Very truly yours,

“CLAIRE PEMBURY.”

“Hadlow Hall,

“September 20th.

“DEAR FRED,

“Two bores have failed me for the 24th. Come and *call*. Leave your things at

the station and I'll send for them afterwards.
Never mind Charlie's rudeness at Sandring-
ham. Do what I tell you, and please,

“CLAIRE.”

This last letter was addressed to the Right
Hon. the Earl of Longbow, Ballquidden, N.B.

CHAPTER VII.

LORD LONGBOW.

As Lord Longbow is a personage of importance in this history, he must be formally presented to the reader. At the age of fourteen his father left him lord of himself (under the mildest form of tutelage—a doating mother) and a heritage of anything but “woe,” which was admirably managed during his minority. He sauntered through Eton doing nothing particularly good or bad. He might have been in the Lord’s eleven if one better player had fallen sick or been unable to play. He was once spoken of for the eight, but was too lazy to train. His leaving books would have filled a cart. When I add that being an earl, and christened

Frederick, he was always called "Bobby," those who know boys can realize exactly what sort of boy he was. He sauntered through Oxford on the same lines. His ample allowance prevented his running into debt, and he got into no stupid scrapes, because he was in all things a gentleman. Before he came of age, society marked him for its own, and made a dead set at him.

In the meantime he was a child, a boy, a very golden youth, with Claire and Owen Hilyar and Pearl, living within a mile of them in his house at Beckhampton. They were all four playmates, and played unchild-like games, in which Claire was author, manager, and leading lady (or gentleman) as the case required. They played Robinson Crusoe, and French Revolution, and Indian Mutiny, in a wood with rocks and a cave in it, and bounded by a trout stream, which

served as the Indian Ocean and the Seine, and the Ganges, according to circumstances. Despite her age and her short petticoats, Claire insisted upon being Crusoe or King Louis, or General Havelock, and Fred (Bobby did not come to him at home) was Man Friday, and so on, some one who was to hide, or fight, or plot with Claire. Owen was cast for the villain who pursued—the King of the Cannibal Islands, Robespierre, or Nana Sahib, and poor little timid Pearl, so much younger than any of them, took the general utility parts, male or female; sometimes a queen, and again an army, or the Governor General of India, and generally stole away tired before the *denouement*. They were very happy, these boys and girls, and as a matter of course Fred and Claire vowed to marry as soon as they were “big.”

This was all very well when the boy was twelve and the girl fourteen, but when time went on and the girl became a woman and the boy was still a boy, a handsome, blue-eyed, curly-haired pink and white child of nineteen, the Dowager Lady Longbow put down her foot. Pretty as Claire was, the daughter of a poor baronet was no match for Fred; and it was due to her ladyship's diplomacy that Lord Charles Hadlow came, saw, and was conquered.

There were no tears or troubles. The course of true love ran as though it had been flooded with patent lubricators. Claire was "out" and Fred still a boy. They were fond of each other, but not in a manner to cause Lady Longbow the slightest uneasiness. Claire and Charlie were fond of each other then. Fred was his best man at the wedding.

It was only when his hereditary enemy—the gout—had soured his temper, and he began to feel that his political success (such as it was) was due to his handsome and politic wife and not to his labours upon blue books, that the green-eyed monster came in.

By this time Fred, pushed by a phalanx of love-sick maidens whom society flung at his head, had begun to defend himself by making love to all the married women. It was fun for them at first, and did not hurt him a bit. It was fun for them because he was “such a boy!” and it didn’t hurt him because he was only in fun all along. When society began to frown and shake its head at the young earl, and want introductions, because he was so bad (it didn’t say so, but that was the truth), Lady Pem laughed. The idea of anyone being afraid of him, dear Fred! It was too absurd. Just as a man delights in riding a

horse because it has thrown a lot of fellows he knows, or prides himself upon making a long score off a bowler whom other fellows funk; Lady Pem took up "poor dear Fred" for the purpose of showing that she could play with what other women thought was fire, and have no blisters on her pretty fingers.

At Vichy—as already hinted—he was her cavalier, and all through one London season she wore his flowers, and drove in his drag, and laughed in his handsome face when he tried to be sentimental.

Pembury became jealous—more, I fancy, because he found himself on a back seat upon all occasions, than out of any real fear. If he had any fear it was for what people might *say*, not for what his wife might do; and he had not common-sense enough to know that the surest way to set people talk-

ing was for him to frown. He took Lady Pem to Barwell on purpose to avoid Longbow, and with regard to the forthcoming festivities at his own country house he laid down this law. His wife might invite the married people and the girls, but he alone was to ask the men. He did not ask Lord Longbow, and he chuckled slightly when he gave permission for the Ranletts to come, as he knew they would fill the last available rooms in the house. So when in answer to the letter we know of, this detrimental appeared there was some unpleasantness.

“How did that fellow get here?” Lord Pembury asked, diving abruptly into his wife’s dressing-room just before dinner.

“Only to pay me a visit on his way—somewhere, I don’t know where he was going,” Lady Pem replied carelessly; “and his stupid driver made him miss the train. So,

of course, I had to ask him to dinner and give him a bed. As the Ranletts have thrown me over there is room for him."

"Did I not tell you that I would ask the men I wanted?"

"Yes, you did; and a nice mess you have made of it! A pretty lot of old fogies you have got together—good for nothing, not even the shooting."

"They are my friends."

"My dear Charlie, one has to consider others. There are three married women here whose husbands are away in Norway fishing, or goodness knows where, doing what; and they must be amused; and five girls without a male creature under forty to do anything with. Look at Lady Bournemouth, poor thing! she is bored to death, and Longbow will do for her splendidly."

"You can leave Lady Bournemouth alone."

“ Oh, yes, I know ! Letty Bournemouth was an old flame of yours, and you’re jealous.”

“ Jack Bournemouth is an old friend of mine, and I’m honest.”

“ Well, then, go and tell Fred that you don’t want him ; that your wife’s invitation, given out of mere politeness, goes for nothing ; that you wish your guests to be dull, or—better still—tell them the truth. Tell them that you don’t trust your wife with her old playfellow. Admit that you are afraid of the boy, and make him go. I daresay he can get a bed at the inn.”

“ That’s just like you,” growled her husband. “ You do these idiotic things and leave me to get out of them. You like to make me odious.”

“ Oh, my dear Charlie ! if you only knew how I like you to be quite the other thing. You are not a good manager. The arrange-

ment you made was really a very stupid one. If you want a lot of professors and prigs, let them bring their women to match, and I'll bear it as best I can. But if I'm to ask people like Letty Bournemouth, and the Fleetwoods, and the Spencers, and the Fairholme girls, we must have men that suit them. You don't interfere at all in London, and you know I manage well there. Why not give me a little of my own way here?"

Lord Pembury snarled something about London being different, and retired. But he so comported himself to Longbow that if the Earl had thought himself asked out of mere politeness, he would have packed up his traps and gone to the inn that night. As it was he stayed out the week—during which the Ranletts (oh! daring Lady Pem!) had thrown over their fair hostess—not minding Charlie's rudeness, as he was bidden.

It was a fact that the highly respectable peers, and under-secretaries, and county magistrates, bidden by Lord Pembury, were not suitable company for Letty Bournemouth and the Fleetwoods, and the Spencers, and the Fairholme girls. Also that Longbow behaved admirably from their point of view. He brought over some soldiers from the nearest barracks and got up a dance and some daylight gaieties "which really *saved* us," grateful Lady Pem declared; but this plunged him deeper and deeper still in her lord's bad books.

"You have behaved like an *angel*, Fred," he was told in the midst of this blessed change. "What should I have done without you?"

"It's been rather stiff work," he replied. "I didn't think Pembury could be such a cad; in his own house, too."

"Oh, you mustn't mind him, poor fellow! It's part of his complaint. The gout gives him bad temper, and bad temper gives him the gout; so round and round we go."

"It is his conduct to you that I'm thinking of; always jeering and snarling, and saying little spiteful things *at* you."

"I can take care of myself, Fred, and you mustn't call Pembury a cad—to me. Now listen, for I've got something particular to say to you. You can help me, and I'm sure you will, like a dear good boy. You remember Pearl Herbert who used to play with us at Beckhampton? Well, you were too young to know about a scandal that was got up against her some years ago. A horrid old creature one meets sometimes, a Mrs. Downing, tried to do her out of some money, and told a lot of lies. You know how lies keep, Fred!"

“And how they grow. I believe I’m the best lied-about man in England.”

“Then be good, out of a fellow-feeling to our poor little old playmate, and if there’s any talk about her at the clubs you must—stop, I haven’t told you why. She’s going to marry a man we met in America, quite a nice fellow. Yes, let me tell you, Fred, that when these Americans *are* nice they can give you men points. She’s going to marry Mr. René Ranlett, and *he is a friend of mine*—let that be known. I shall take her up, and I’ll cut any woman that says a word against her. You can throw out a hint of that, too. But don’t you begin, you know. Wait till you hear anything, and then put your foot down on it hard.”

“What a heart you have, Claire.”

“Now, Fred! sighing like a furnace and

looking foolish is no answer to what I ask. Will you do this for me?"

"I will do anything and everything for you. You have only to order."

"Then I order you to be very nice to Letty Bournemouth all to-night, and not come near me once."

"That's hard on a fellow," he replied dolefully.

"It may go harder on me if you don't," she replied with a sigh.

"I'd be nice all night to the devil himself to save you that sigh, dear Claire."

"Silly boy," was all she said, nor did she think then that any more serious rebuke was required.

Later on she spoiled a beautiful velvet dress, and made a discovery; though poor Fred obeyed orders and devoted himself exclusively to Lady Bournemouth.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL.

GEORGE MARSHALL's appointment as managing partner of the Albert Glass Works necessitated the removal of his household gods from Staffordshire, and their bestowal in a London house. Pearl did the house-hunting, which was by no means an easy business. She had to find fresh air, and a dry soil (on account of Cissy's rheumatism) within a reasonable distance of the works (for George's sake), and this at a rent within their means plus the sum she contributed to the house-keeping expenses, which—by-the-bye—was a very moderate one. They had given her a home when the issue of the trial, so often mentioned, was doubtful; and she had changed her last sovereign.

If they had been ordinary people they would, perhaps, have considered themselves entitled to live with *her*, when she came in for her fortune, in the style which her three thousand a year warranted ; but for reasons of his own George Marshall determined that if they continued together she should live in *his* style, in proportion to *his* income, and pay (there was a fight about her paying *at all* when she began to teach Mab) just what she cost them, and no more.

Once, and once only, he consented to borrow from her. A dearly loved invention was dying of want, and he humbled himself to take help for it, as though it were a sick child. When she proposed *herself* as the partner with capital that he sought, he laughed at her.

“ We should ruin each other in a year,” he said. “ My partner must be a man of

business, who will look after the pot boilers " (by pot boilers he meant the useful work which always found a market), " and keep me from going too fast."

So Pearl had to find such a home as I have mentioned with a garden (if possible) for Mab, stable room for Cissy's ponies, and all at a hundred a year.

She found it at Norwood, and astonished Marshall by the business-like manner in which she settled all the details about fixtures, and repairs, and moving; to which he—hard pressed at the works—could not attend.

" If you ever dare to laugh at me again," she said, " I'll set a house agent at you, and then you'll know what a woman of business I have been."

Two days after Mr. Flowers' journey to Hadlow, the moving had arrived at that de-

lightful stage when everything is in the house, and nothing in its place, and the average mind is distracted at the apparent impossibility of ever producing order out of the chaos presented. All the doors were open. Upholsterers laying down carpets, were quarrelling with gasfitters hanging up chandeliers—each accusing the other of “hindering,”—and both routed, every now and then by the mover’s men who, armed with battering rams in the shape of wardrobes and other heavy articles of furniture ; charged all comers to a battle cry of “By your leave.”

The coals were coming in, and empty packing cases going out. Mab, who had passed through several hairbreadth escapes in the frays aforesaid, was relegated a strict prisoner in her mother’s room—the only habitable apartment in the house.

Pearl was on a step ladder in the drawing-

room—the next presentable place—hanging pictures (mostly her own water colours which no one was allowed to touch), with her gown pinned up about her, a handkerchief tied round her head (her hair *would* fall down), a large black smudge on her face, and her pretty hands in the condition described by nurserymaids as “not fit to be seen,”—when, without the slightest notice or warning, in marched—Mr. René Ranlett !

“I couldn’t get anyone to announce me,” he said, “it is most fortunate for your friends, Miss Herbert, that I am—at present, honestly disposed. I could easily have run away with the hat stand, a meat safe, and a beautiful set of fireirons. Can’t I help you ?”

Pearl subsided on the top of her ladder, and would have covered her face with her hands if she had dared to show them.

“Mr. Ranlett!” she gasped. “You are—I—this is”—

“*Persecution?*” he interrupted, with a smile. “Oh, no, don’t say that. Please excuse the intrusion, and let me help. You owe me something after the abominable way you behaved at Barwell.”

We know that Pearl can be dignified upon occasion, and that she has curbed the man who now addresses her, with a look; but you cannot be dignified on the top of a step ladder, or smite with a stony stare when you have a smudge on your face. Pearl knew she had a smudge on her face, for it made her squint, as smudges will.

She had to come down, in both senses of the words, and stood before him undecided whether to laugh or to cry, with her hands behind her back.

“Shake hands,” he said, in his usual grave tone. “I forgive you.”

“I’m not fit to be touched,” she pleaded, clasping her fingers tighter together in their hiding place.

“That’s for me to judge,” he insisted. “Please shake hands.”

She looked at the hand he held out—it was strong and firm. She looked in his face—that was strong and firm too. She hesitated ; then she tried to rub off on her gown, out of sight, some of her grime ; then after two false starts she turned her head aside, hardened her heart, and put out her hand. It fell upon his, and was not clasped and pressed as she expected, but something soft and warm descended upon it. A lovely sea-shell pink flooded her face and neck, glorifying even the smudge, as she murmured reproachfully—

"You should not have done that, Mr. Ranlett."

"I would not," he replied, "if it had been clean."

She gave a quick glance at him to find a smile, or a sneer. There was no smile or sneer, only that expression of tender respect which she had told Cissy was like a glimpse of heaven to her.

"Come," he said, "this is idling. Let me do something. No one can hang pictures alone. Why, what a coil is here! You've expended half a yard of cord in knots, and every one of them will slip. Allow me to exhibit my nautical acquirements. Look now; this is what sailors call a clove hitch. The more you pull at it the tighter it gets. That's right now. Will you go to the other side of the room," he said, mounting the ladder, picture in hand, "and tell me

when the frame is level with the one opposite."

She obeyed him. There was a quiet sense of power about him all over, that she liked. Besides, it was a relief to be doing something—anything that would avoid the subject she dreaded.

The pictures were hung, and the next work on hand was to unpack a huge box full of drawing-roomnick-nacks, books, photographs, and so on. But this necessitated a washing of hands, Pearl ran up to Cissy's room, and René was consigned to what would be George Marshall's den some day, when the golden age came ; but at present the place presented the appearance of a marine store dealer's back parlour after an alarm of fire.

He performed his ablutions in a tin pan brought up from the kitchen, with a lump of yellow soap borrowed from the charwoman,

and a bath sheet in which a Parian statuette had been packed. He had only just finished, when Pearl reappeared, looking as though she had met Cinderella's fairy godmother on the stairs.

As I have already said you could roll her down Primrose Hill in a flour barrel and she would give herself a shake and come out as natty as ever! A little silky chocolate foot in a little bronze shoe—both as dainty, as dainty could be—peeped out beneath a skirt of some dark stuff, heavily plaited, with a shimmer of bronze amongst the folds. A beautiful thoroughbred head, around which a thick rope of chestnut hair was coiled in splendid simplicity; and between these two extremes the figure of a daughter of the gods!

René noted nothing of this. He looked only in her steadfast eyes, which fascinated

him. After a short spell of work they ceased, as though by mutual consent, and stood side by side at the window, silent ; tongue-tied by a mixture of happiness and fear.

“I want,” he began at last, speaking very slowly, to curb the tremor in his voice he could not wholly conquer, “to return for a moment to that old discussion of ours. No—not to trouble you with any reasons for proving me to have been in the right, but to admit, without reservation, that I was wrong—wrong, you know, without intention. I can now imagine conditions of—conditions under which the advances I made to you at Barwell might wound dreadfully. I want most humbly to beg your pardon.”

Her lips moved, but no word passed them.

“I want you once more to give me your hand,” he continued. “No, don’t be afraid.

You can trust me. I had to kiss it just now because you said it was not fit to be touched, I want to hold this hand that you give me in forgiveness " (this was not true, for he had taken it), "to look into those honest eyes and say, ' Pearl '—yes, I must call you Pearl this once. Do not tremble so—trust me not to say a word that can give you pain. Have you forgotten what you said once about your name? You said that when you were a little thing they called you *Pearl*? Well, since that day you have been *Pearl* to me, and I have thought about you all that the sweet name implies. I shall always do so. Though I may never call you so again, you are, and always will be *Pearl*."

"The disease of a poor oyster," she replied, with a sad smile, and disengaging his hand, "gathered out of corruption, and used for show."

“I take another view,” he said gently. “Your poor oyster is troubled with something—a grain of sand perhaps—which has fallen into his shell through no fault of his. He cannot cast it out, and so he makes it into a gem. If people put him through an unsavoury process to obtain his hidden treasure, that is no fault of his, is it? And the pearl is none the worse.”

“There are false pearls.”

“There are false *everything*s,” he replied quickly. “False friends, false witnesses, false judges who reverse the process of your poor oyster. A pearl falls amongst them and they cover it with filth. Well, it’s none the worse for that in the end.”

“Yes,” her lovely eyes were dimmed with tears as she raised them to the darkening sky, —“*in the end!*” It was but a murmur. He did not catch it, and continued—

"It has always been a pearl. Its nature has not changed or its value diminished. Happy the hand that may remove the unmerited stain, and hold the purity which shines beneath." She had turned from him with bowed head and heaving bosom. He dared not look at her lest he should break through the bonds he had imposed upon himself and clasp her to his heart.

"So," he continued, cheerily, "I have called you *Pearl* to your face, and the roof has not fallen. Do you know how I found you out? Through Mr. Marshall, of course. I have been all over the new works, and I'm going again. I find them most interesting. I declare! six o'clock! and we haven't half unpacked that box. May I come to-morrow—early, and help some more?"

"Oh no—pray—I can have—it's a shame to take up your time," she stammered.

“My time,” he replied, “is my own, and the least valuable of my possessions. I have absolutely nothing to do for a week. Oh! by the bye, that reminds me. I had a letter this morning from Lady Pembury.”

“Yes.”

“We were going on a visit to her on the 24th, but she has put us off.” (He was watching Pearl now as a fencer does his adversary.) “Perhaps you do not remember her?”

“*Remember?* I do not think I ever knew her.”

“She was a Miss Hilyar, and lived near Beckhampton. She remembers you, and expresses her regret that circumstances have parted you since her marriage. She says that when she comes to town she will do her best to renew the old friendship. That’s all. Remember me to Mrs. Marshall, and good-bye till to-morrow.”

He seized his hat and hurried out of the room, but paused in the landing to listen. No, she had not fainted—not fallen, at any rate. “I think Miss Herbert wants somebody to help her—move that box,” he told a servant, whom he met on the stairs.

* * * * *

Half an hour after he had gone Pearl entered Cissy's room and threw herself into a chair like a woman thoroughly tired out. “Mab, darling,” she said, “won't you go to Mary for ten minutes, I want to talk secrets with mamma.”

“I know what it's about,” observed the intelligent child, preparing to obey. “It's about his friend, the man he met at the works. I don't like him—by himself. I'll like him if Mr. René likes him, though,” she explained, with a reassuring nod, as she closed the door.

“George has betrayed me,” Pearl began with an attempt at vexation which failed. “It’s too bad. He has told Mr. Ranlett where I live, and actually let him call here to-day.”

“I’m as glad as glad!” Cissy cried, clapping her hands. “It serves you right—no, I don’t mean that; it serves *him* right, poor fellow! You made me treat him beastly bad—very bad.”

“Badly.”

“You made me treat him very badly at Barwell. If you’d seen the poor fellow’s face when I told him you had gone away and wouldn’t let me tell him where!”

“Cissy, dear, tell me truth. Did he seem then as though” (with a shudder) “he knew anything?”

“He seemed miserable because he couldn’t see you—that’s all I noticed.”

"He knows everything," Pearl said, "*everything.*"

"Did he tell you so?"

"Tell me?—no, not in words—but he let me know it with a delicacy that—oh, Cissy, he behaved like an angel. He knows everything, and he loves me."

"I've known that some time, but you're such a hard-hearted thing."

"He knows everything," Pearl repeated, with her hands clasped on her knee, and eyes half closed, as one who is guessing a riddle, "and he loves me."

"Do you love him?"

"When I was little," Pearl continued, still in the same musing way, "there were a lot of pretty things about my dear old home that poor papa had collected in India. They were mine, I was told—but I mustn't have them to play with—mustn't even touch them."

I thought it so hard ! There was some consolation, however, I was to have them for my own when I grew up."

Cissy couldn't see what these reflections had to do with her question, and she was eager to have it answered.

"We were talking of René Ranlett," she said.

"Yes," Pearl replied, with a sigh, "and of something that is called mine, but which I may not have—may not *ever* have for my own."

CHAPTER IX.

HOPE DEFERRED.

You can readily imagine that Lady Pem's letter to her brother was a surprise and a delight to him. It seemed to remove one serious obstacle from his path. Pearl could not now reject him on the ground that she would spoil his career, and alienate him from his family. His first impulse was to accept the invitation and have the proposed "long talk," but suppose Pearl were to write whilst he was away, and he should lose the more important interview? Lady Pem had avowed herself half convinced of Pearl's innocence. Was that enough? If he could go to her and offer the reparation of marriage, coupled with complete rehabilitation, that might move

her ; but whilst he was wholly convincing Lady Pem, and she was pleading Pearl's cause with their parents, the golden opportunity might be lost. He was pondering over this when Mr. Flowers came in.

Now it had been arranged between Lady Pembury and this gentleman that he should lead Owen to believe his mission had failed utterly, and that he was very angry with her ladyship in consequence.

With, perhaps, a pardonable air of triumph Owen showed him the letter you have read, and intimated that he was not, at present, going to see the writer. . Flowers tossed the paper from him with a gesture of contempt, and said—

“ Your sister is a woman of the world—of a bad world. She thinks that with her social influence she can whitewash Miss Herbert. ‘ People with three thousand a year needn’t

be cut,' she told me, 'unless they are idiots.' She has no respect for your Holy calling, no regard for your reputation. The wretched money is all she cares for. She thinks" (bitterly) "that you have played your cards well."

"This is absolutely unintelligible," Hilyar replied. "Played my cards!"

"That was her expression, not mine," Flowers said. "I repeat, but am unable to explain it."

"But you must have some idea what she meant."

"If I have, it may be a wrong one—ask her."

"I most certainly will; but as we are on the subject of this money, I wish to assure you that if Miss Herbert consents to become my wife, I will not touch a penny of it, nor will I allow her to keep it. All shall be restored.

Good God ! could my own sister think that I could offer this reparation for money ? ”

“ Your sister does not know that you are making what you call ‘ *reparation.* ’ ”

“ That is true. ”

“ A person whom you have known as a child,” Flowers summed up, “ becomes—rightly or wrongly—the object of a grave scandal, and obtains a considerable fortune. Believing her guilty, you warn young Ranlett against her. That very night you have an interview with her, and what are the consequences ? You suddenly become her defender, she removes into your parish, and renews the acquaintance by sending you a donation for your schools. That is, perhaps, how the case presents itself to Lady Pembury, and judging from her point of view she considers that you have played your cards well. ”

"This is monstrous!" cried Owen, flushing with indignation.

Mr. Flowers shrugged his shoulders.

"People judge according to their lights," he replied.

"Then there is nothing left but to tell her all."

"That would make a difference," said Mr. Flowers drily.

"I will go," Hilyar muttered, "half an hour will set this right."

Mr. Flowers turned his face aside.

By the morning's post of the 24th Lady Pembury received the following:—

"He will go. Keep to the money points we discussed. He says he will not touch her fortune. Dwell upon the folly of this and he will persist. She will not make the sacrifice.

THE PEOPLE WHO ARE LIVING ON HER WOULDN'T

LET HER IF SHE WOULD. KEEP HIM AS LONG AS
YOU CAN.

“M. F.”

When a lady has thirty guests to entertain, she can easily escape a “long talk” alone with any one of them; though he be her own brother invited for the purpose. Two long weary days did Owen pass in brilliant company, waiting for that half-hour, and when at last he seized it, the outcome was as unsatisfactory as could well be.

He had to fight a difficult case with half-truths; and to relinquish the weapon which would help him most in this field of contest. He had to dilute his real motive till it lost all colour and strength. He could not tell Lady Pem how deeply he owed reparation, he could only say he had injured the girl by joining in the cry against her; and this was

a very poor reason for seeking the consent of his family, before he had obtained her own. He *would* not take advantage of the excuse so craftily suggested by Mr. Flowers, that he wanted to snap her up for her three thousand a year, and with this part of the subject he began.

"Yes, yes," replied Lady Pem impatiently, "that's all right. I understand; of course, you didn't run after her, or she after you. Flowers was a wretch to put it so coarsely; but really, Owen, it is a good thing, and you must not spoil it by being in too great a hurry."

He could not tell her that the interview he hoped for with Pearl was to be a final one, and that if he were not prepared then with the inducement he required, his mouth might be closed for ever. He could not tell her that as the case really stood there was

no necessity for courtship—no place for the happy anxious waiting of one love to catch the dawn of the other ; no fear of speaking too soon, but rather the certainty of failure if he did not speak at once.

“ Every day that passes,” he replied, “ adds to the injustice I have done, and the necessity of repairing it.”

“ Well, my dear boy, go to her ; say you’re sorry, beg pardon, make two or three pretty speeches, and leave the seed to grow. Are you really so conceited as to think that a woman whom some people think pretty, with a fortune, is going to fall in love with you and marry you all in a moment without any trouble ? Why you are heavily handicapped at the start. Do you think that people really respect those who beg their pardon ? They say so ; but they don’t. They despise them,

particularly when they go about with their heads in the air—as they generally do—full of what they think the nobility of their conduct.”

“That is not my case.”

“Not entirely, perhaps; but if you were to look deep into your heart, brother mine, you’d find a motive for this, based in self-satisfaction. You want to do a generous thing, you like yourself for wanting to do it, and you like the girl because it is to be done about her—*voilà tout!* Now suppose that there had been none of this fuss, that you had—let us say—stepped on her dress at an ev’ning party and torn it, would you think it wise to ask her to do you some favour in the same breath that you begged her pardon for your awkwardness? You would not. You’d say to yourself, ‘Better wait till she’s in a good humour.’ Why, when we were

children, didn't we always wait till after dinner to ask papa for anything we wanted?"

"My dear Claire," he replied, "don't you see that your arguments are all on my side? It would be unwise, I admit, to go to Pearl with only my own regrets, and ask her to be my wife. I want to take with me the assurance that I have influenced others. You know how she loved our mother. Surely a kind message from her would induce the happiest state of mind!"

"I don't think that her love for our mother was as intense as you suppose, Owen. She wrote to her twice, if I remember right, after she left our house, and then she dropped us all. She has been knocking about the world for four years, and although, perhaps, she hasn't been as bad as they say, it is very clear that she has behaved most ungratefully to us. Never mind. We can afford to

look over that, and do the right thing at the right time and in the right way ; but we must not expect any affection from her. Now tell me how many times have you seen her since she left Beckhampton ? ”

“ Twice.”

“ Only twice ! Really, Owen, I am astonished ! Twice in four years, and you think of proposing ! ”

“ I might lose her if I did not.”

“ Ah ! ” Lady Pem asked innocently, “ is there another Richard in the field ? ”

“ I know that Mr. René Ranlett was paying her attention at Barwell, and ”—

“ Oh, René Ranlett knows what he is about. That is all over. I had it from the Judge himself. In the first place he didn't want his son to marry an English-woman—we had a long conversation on the subject when we were at that dreadful place.

She was the only woman René knew there before I came—except the bricklayer's wife—and they amused each other ; nothing more. Do you remember that little squabble you had ? Well, he told me that what made him so sorry for having lost his temper, was that it might compromise him with the woman by making her think he had become her champion.”

“ He did become her champion.”

“ His father made some inquiries, I am told, just to clear things up. He is a very obstinate old man—delights in setting himself up against what everyone else says. He took delight in trying to make out that we were all wrong, but do you imagine for an instant that he would have made his conclusions known if he were not perfectly sure that René was quite out of danger ? ”

“ Danger ! ”

“My dear Owen, when there are so many nice girls about, who have never had mud thrown at them, a father don't care to have a scraped one for his daughter-in-law, however carefully the scraping has been done.”

“That is horribly unjust.”

“It's the way of the world, and these Americans are particularly sensitive in such matters. They can buy wives and husbands for their sons and daughters out of our order, but all their money cannot gild over a mud stain so that it won't show at home. They are better than we are in that way. If René were to marry a woman with a history, she would be cut. We are not nearly as— as stupid. No one will dare breathe a syllable against Pearl when I take her up. All you have got to do is to be patient and wait. Just consider how much better it will be for you to propose after she has been brought back; how infinitely better for her. People

mustn't be allowed to say that I *had* to take her up because you were going to marry her. That would never do. They would be sure, then, that you were after her money, don't you see! Marry her from my house, and the fact that she has three thousand a year won't be considered. Take her from her bricklayer's and see what will be said! You are famous, you know, and must expect to be talked about. 'The Rev. Owen Hilyar is married!' 'Who was she?' will be in fifty mouths at once. 'Oh! that Herbert woman there was a scandal about.' 'Eh! what the deuce did he marry her for?' 'Ah! she had three thousand a year.' How would you like that? Trust to me and wait. Now I really must go. I promised the Duchess—ta-ta, and mind what I say."

It was, however, not the Duchess who waited for the hostess, but Frederick, Lord Longbow, who had hurt his hand out shoot-

ing the day before, and was to be taken into town to buy some arnica. This then, was Owen's reward for waiting all that time, being put off from morning till noon, and from noon till night in a constant fret lest Pearl's answer might be lying neglected on his table at home ! There was no answer for him. The relief at finding that he had not missed it, was more than counter-balanced by disappointment that it had not come. What—he fretted—was the meaning of this delay ? Could Pearl have forgotten her promise ? Surely Marshall had shown her his (Owen's) note, acknowledging their donation, and in which a hope was expressed that the lady whose almoner he was would personally inspect the schools by which her munificence would profit. Could she have made that promise only to get rid of him, never intending to keep it ?

CHAPTER X.

TRUE LOVE.

WHILST he was thus tormented with doubts and disappointment, Pearl went on with the moving and putting to rights in the new house, never giving him a thought. The promise upon which he relied had been given in good faith, but had clean gone out of her mind, and the letter acknowledging her benevolence which might have brought it back, had not reached her. Marshall received it at the works, put it carefully in his pocket so as not to forget to take it home, and carried it backwards and forwards for a week ! One night—with the “By Jove ! I forgot,” usual under the circumstances—it was forwarded and read. Then Pearl’s heart smote her, for she had passed those seven days in

paradise. The man she loved with all her soul, had shown that he never had doubted her—this was her supreme joy. That he should believe in her *after* proof, would have been the more logical ground of satisfaction, but there is no logic in love. You can realize now the strength of her resentment against him for his attempts to make her acquaintance at Barwell, and can measure the depth of sorrow out of which that cry “Where is it stamped upon me?” was drawn. Well, he had never presumed (as so many had done) upon her unprotected beauty. He always trusted, and now! he loved her—that she knew, though the sweet word had not passed his lips. He loved her, her old friends would at least do her justice, her enemies would be silenced, she had lived the slander down! and—and he loved her. Oh, the joy of it, and oh! the pain!

In this frame of mind she was reminded of her promise to Owen Hilyar, and thought of the hard words with which she had driven him out into the night. In one respect, at least, she had wronged him. He was no hypocrite. Should she who had so bitterly felt the injustice of being condemned unheard, deny him a hearing? She did not go through the ceremony of consulting her friends, but wrote at once, thus—

“MISS HERBERT presents her compliments to the Rev. Owen Hilyar, and begs to inform him that if he still desires an interview upon the subject mentioned when they met last, she will be at home on Monday and Tuesday next, from one until four o’clock.

“Upper Park House,

“Norwood,

“Sept. 30th.”

This was written in a room which was now thoroughly "to rights" in spite—if truth were told—of René's assistance. He had called every day since he hung the pictures, to help "some more," and generally a good deal was done in the first half-hour or so, after which the work would slacken, and the workers gravitate towards that window by which they had stood when the parable of the Pearl was told—he wondering if the happy time had come when he might say "I love you," she dreading the knell of the happy time those words would ring.

Pearl gave her letter to be posted, made for her window, and looked down the road. The side from which she could see farthest was that on which she usually stood when René was there. After a while she changed her place, and instead of resting her cheek upon her hand, as before, she carefully placed

it upon the window frame ; having previously kissed the chosen spot. It was the spot on which René's hand had often rested ; had rested that day when—as she told Cissy—he had acted “like an angel.” She knew he was going away next morning on the deferred visit to Hadlow Hall, and her woman's heart told her that her greatest happiness and crowning misery were near.

In this position she was caught when Mr. Ranlett was announced.

“I have come to say”—“good-bye” was on his lips, but he checked himself as their hands met, and substituted in a changed tone, “You've been crying?”

“Not much,” she said, turning her face aside.

“Do you often cry—not much?” he asked, retaining her hand.

“I didn't even know I was crying,” she

replied, "until—let us go to the fire. Isn't it cold to-day?"

"Your thoughts must have been painful ones," he persisted, evading the meteorological remark, "to wring unnoticed tears from your eyes. Why, your face is wet with crying."

"Is it? Then please let me have my hand to dry it."

"Poor little hand," he said, "so cold."

"Yes, and you won't let me go to the fire and warm it."

He drew a comfortable arm-chair for her close to the blaze, and sat himself by her side in one of those low-seated, slanting-backed, contrivances which require a small gymnastic feat to sit down in, and a great one to rise up from.

She wore a robe of garnet velvet, simply made. A cloud of soft lace emerged from

the bosom, spread around her neck and returned to its sweet source.

The little foot she rested on the fender-bar, was clad in garnet velvet and white silk. On one of the hands she held to be warmed, shone a diamond ring, and on the wrist of the other a massive, dull gold bracelet—these were all the ornaments she wore. No perfume loaded the air around her. No perfumer's trash marred the purity of her face. She was not looking her best—no woman who has been crying can. Her eyes were clouded with sadness: the pose of her head—thrown back with a slight turn—was sad, but if this detracted somewhat from her beauty, it added a charm which might have curbed the passion of a false lover, and was elevating the love of the true one by her side, into adoration.

“We are going to visit the Pemburys—

father and I—to-morrow," he said when they had settled into their seats, "I hate going," he paused, hoping that she might say, "Then why go?" or at any rate ask something which might be made to mean "Stay." Quite a different question came.

"In your country are all fathers and sons as devoted to each other as you and your father?"

"I hope that a great number are," he replied, "but my father is one in a thousand."

"I have no recollection of mine," she went on, dreamily. "I came home—from India, you know, with my mother, when I was six. He was to have joined us when his time of service was out, but he died. And then, ten years afterwards, my mother died, and then I—died"—

"That is a very good way to put it," said René. "Let us say that the Pearl Herbert

of that time was *murdered*, but that her spirit passed into another form which lives to be happy, and make others supremely so."

"Will you tell me," she asked him, after a long pause, "how you have learned my story?"

"I will. I have no secrets from my father. There was one" (with a smile) "which I kept from myself, but he guessed it. I told him something which Mr. Hilyar said about you, and he determined, for my sake, to probe it to the bottom. He has done so. Need I say more?"

"How he must hate me!"

"Hate you!" he exclaimed, all the pre-arranged speeches which were to lead up to a declaration of his love forgotten. "Hate *you*, my darling! Oh, Pearl, the secret he guessed was that I love you; I didn't know it till the villain who tried to blacken you in

my estimation, spoke. I knew he lied because I loved you. I knew I loved you when he lied. All is now clear. You have been bitterly, wickedly wronged, my Pearl! but if no proof had been made I would never have wavered. I should have told you, as I do now, I love you, and asked as trustfully for your love."

She had prepared herself for this. She made no gesture of surprise. The sad expression on her face deepened, that was all.

"René, dear friend," she replied in a low steady voice, "you are seeking endless misery for us both. You think you can take me away to a country where my miserable story is unknown. You cannot take me away from the memory of it—the whole world is not wide enough for that. If I were your wife I should be miserable every moment that you were out of my sight."

“ My darling ! ”

She did not try to release the hand he seized, but continued in the same measured tones.

“ Because I should be in constant dread of your hearing something to remind you of it. The world is a small one, and there are thousands of people going about who pride themselves upon knowing bad things ; and dear, don't think me vain ; but of course I know that I attract attention. Some one of these busybodies would ask, ‘ Who is that ? ’ and he would be told, ‘ Mrs. René Ranlett,’ and then he would ask, ‘ Who was she ? ’ They would reply, ‘ An Englishwoman, a Miss Herbert,’ and then he would say, ‘ Ah ! indeed ! wasn't there a story about her ? ’ And this would fly from mouth to mouth, and you would *see* it, and be made to feel it even if it never reached your ears. If ever you came

home worried or disappointed—as a man will be, you know, sometimes—I should fancy it was my fault, that you repented, that some slight had been put upon you through me—I could not bear it.”

He was caressing the imprisoned hand in both of his own, and following the course of the blue veins with kisses. He looked up with that queer smile of his that might mean jest or earnest, and said—

“Then you will have to keep me always in your sight. *I* shouldn’t mind.”

“It is not kind of you to speak like that when my heart”—she gently disengaged her hand and pressed it so lightly to her side that the rosy finger tips became white as snow. “But this is only the selfish side. Your father”—

“Leaves me to seek my own happiness,” he interposed, “makes no objection.”

"No objection ! Oh, René ! what a gulf there is between 'no objection,' and the welcome he would give another as your wife. You have a mother and a sister."

"The best of women."

"Yes, but the best of women are hard upon their own sex, and I have heard that such society as you belong to in America is far more strict than we are here. What do you propose to do about your mother and your sister ? Tell them all the truth ? If you did, they would never love me, and I should separate you. Keep them in ignorance ? Then I could never look them in the face, and that would separate you."

"No, my Pearl. If we hold high the reputation of our wives and daughters—and thank God we do—we are just. I could tell my dear mother all, without the slightest fear, for she is not the woman I take her to

be if it did not make her love you the more."

"With a love born of pity, and perhaps clouded with mistrust."

"This is unkind, unjust," he answered her vehemently, "and all wide of the mark. My heart is yours, my life is my own. Deep as is my affection for my parents and my home, they are nothing to me in comparison to *you*. I need not return to America; it seems almost cowardly to do so. I can remain here, where you have so bravely lived down the scandal, and stamp out the last spark of it by your side. I love you, Pearl; have no thought, no care, no hope but for your love. Can I make you happy? that is all we have to think of now. Leave the rest aside, and tell me out of your heart, do you love me? Will you be my wife?"

"Dear," she replied, so softly that at

another time he might not have caught her words, "the answer I must give you almost breaks my heart. I will not be your wife because—because I love you. No" (as he tried to clasp her in his arms), "not that. I will kiss you my poor René—*once*. Kiss you good-bye. Does not that mean 'God be with you?' God be with you, noblest, best, and dearest; make you happy, and teach you to forget your tarnished pearl; but not too soon." She stooped and touched his forehead with her lips. "Spare me, dear René, and let these be my last words."

"You do not love me," he cried, man-like, stabbing her tortured bosom with passionate anger.

"René," she said, "life is dear to us all. My life had become dear to me even before I—I knew you, for I saw that I could do some good; make some people happy; but if I

were sure, *quite* sure, that I should die in your arms the first time you called me 'wife,' I should have no sorrow, but for you. All the rest of my life without you would not bring me the joy of that moment. I might have given you a false reason, told you I did not love you; but then you would have thought that I had played with your generous heart, and I could not bear that. The truth is better for us both. In time you will remember me as your best friend, one who gave you once great pain, but stood between you and a sacrifice. God bless you."

With that she rose and left him struck dumb by the first sorrow of his happy life.

CHAPTER XI.

“ ALL ARRANGED—EVERYTHING ! ”

ABOUT this time Lady Pembury was informed by Mr. Flowers that all things were going on precisely as they wished. Mr. Ranlett was visiting Miss Herbert every day, whilst Owen remained at home waiting for the answer which that lady, more pleasantly engaged, had evidently forgotten to write. From this it will appear that Mr. Flowers was keeping a bright look-out over both parties, and that not being Sir Boyle Roche's little bird, he must be employing some one else to watch one or the other.

On the 1st October, the day on which the Ranletts arrived at Hadlow, he wrote, “ Owen has got his answer, couched in the most

frigid terms. Ranlett was with her on the day of its date, and probably dictated it. Owen is to see her on Monday or Tuesday, when, if I am not mistaken, she will tell him of her engagement." So that when René asked his hostess that evening if she would let him speak with her alone upon a subject of much importance, Lady Pem thought what a clever creature Mr. Flowers was, and told René she would send her maid for him after breakfast the next day. There was no difficulty about half-hours now. Lord Longbow had departed, her ladyship was curious, and there was no object to be gained by delay.

René was received in the cosy sanctum where the chiefs of her household made their reports and received their orders (poor Owen's *mauvaise quart-d'heure* had been passed on a landing) and cordially told to

come to the fire, make himself quite comfortable (he might smoke if he liked), and tell her "all about it."

"I want to speak to you," he began, "about Miss Herbert."

"Of course," Lady Pem said with a smile, "I guessed that; when is it to be?" She entirely mistook the cause of his changing countenance, and went on, "My dear Mr. Ranlett, make me your friend. You know my feelings towards the poor girl. Nothing would delight me more than to see her happily married, and really if she had the whole world to choose from she couldn't have chosen better. You are young, handsome, very well off, very fond of her, and in America no one"—

"Your ladyship must excuse me if I interrupt," René broke in, "but this is too painful. I am not engaged to Miss Herbert."

"Faint heart! what have you been about? I thought it was all settled before you left town!"

"It was—she refused me."

"Impossible!"

"She refused me."

"For effect!" exclaimed Lady Pem, her discretion overpowered by vexation and surprise, "to draw you on; those creatures—creatures of emotion you know," (steading herself) "do lots of stupid things. As a girl she was quite emotional, and has had so much to try her since; poor dear! And did you *really* take her 'no' for no? Men in love are *so* silly. Well, you must try again."

"I hope to do so," he told her, "with your aid. You must however, excuse my differing with you about her character. I do not find it in the least emotional, but on the contrary, very calm and resolute. She re-

fuses me for my own sake—as she says—fearing that her story"—

"Oh if it's only *that*! that's easily settled," Lady Pem interrupted, much relieved. "Wait till we go to town. I'll have her at my house, and then no one will dare to talk about her. And really there is nothing to talk about. Appearances were against her—that is all. Well, appearances will be in her favour when I take her up."

"That is right."

Lady Pem expected a more effusive reply.

"Only right Mr. Ranlett?" she asked drawing herself up.

"We cannot do more than right," was his answer, "a great countryman of mine said he would rather be *right* than President. Does not your maxim—'*noblesse*' *oblige* contain a somewhat similar thought? I hope you will not misunderstand me, Lady Pembury," he

continued, as no reply came "your world—the world in which you are a judge and a law-giver, has done Pearl Herbert a grievous wrong for which she is entitled to reparation *as a right*—not as a favour. I am speaking for her thus far, and should be sorry to appear ungrateful, because personally I think you are very very kind, more than kind, you are just, and generous, and I thank you with all my heart."

"Ah well, we understand each other," Lady Pem replied, somewhat mollified, "but when you know this world of mine (as you call it) a little better, you will find it does not like being told it has to do this or that as a matter of *right*. It will do what it is told to do in the proper way, by the proper people, and there is no necessity to trouble it with the reason why. Now is there anything else I can do?"

"Much, if you will be so good you will readily understand that there are many things that a man cannot urge upon his sweetheart in a case like this, but which another woman, especially a married woman, can for him. I want your personal influence with her."

"I tell you what I'll do" said Lady Pem, after thinking for a moment, "I've got to pass through town on my way to visit some people in Hampshire about the" (referring to her diary) "25th, I'll arrange to stop a whole day and I'll devote it to pleading your cause. In the meantime if you like, I'll write to her, tell her I'm coming, and that a certain person could not eat his dinner yesterday for love of her. There, cheer up; it'll all come right."

René left the sanctum rejoicing in this powerful alliance, and the powerful ally remained to think about Mr. Flowers and what to tell him. There are some people who get

put out at the first mistake, and never have a second innings; and others who give a dozen chances, and stay in till the end. Mr. Flowers was in the latter category. This quiet little man with his leaden face, his tongue that never faltered, and his lips that never smiled, had impressed Lady Pem with the idea that he could not blunder, and indeed he had not blundered, so far as she was aware. His plan was successful. Owen had been kept back, and René pushed forward. René had proposed just as he (Flowers) anticipated, and it was absurd to suppose that his rejection was intended to be final. "What can the wretch" (meaning Pearl) "want?" Lady Pem asked herself; "has he" (meaning René) "shown her my letter, and are they in a plot together to use me as a cat's-paw to pull her out of the mire." Should she write Flowers all about it, or send for him? Or should she

work the affair out in her own way, without his aid? He had let fall some expressions during his flying visit of the week before about the marriage of Priests, which gave her a shudder to think of. And she wanted Owen to marry, and be weaned from his slum, as a right sort of wife would do.

The notion of taking Pearl up and forcing her into society, was by no means an unpleasant one to Lady Pem. She liked startling her world, and showing it her power. If some other *grande dame* got in the way, and had to be run over, so much the better.

It would be a sensational *coup* for the winter season, and when René and his bride were safely out of the way on the other side of the Atlantic, she could hedge, if necessary, as Mr. Flowers had pointed out. Yes, all things considered, she determined to do without Mr. Flowers, as Owen was in no sort of

danger now. If the creature (even in her thoughts she could not give Pearl a name) were playing with René (who was so much the better match) she would certainly not let Owen snap her up. But here came a possibility not yet considered. Suppose she had rejected René for fear of something not yet found out. Well, if the fear of disclosures prevented her from accepting a foreigner who could take her to live abroad, surely she would not dare to marry in the place where her secret (whatever it might be) was hidden.

This theory of dreaded disclosures, which at first had passed lightly across Lady Pem's mind, began to trouble her when, having slept on her resolve to work out the affair in her own way, and ratified it; she asked herself what next to do, and next? The more she saw of René Ranlett the more she liked him, and yet he had to be made the scape-

goat for her brother! That was hard. Couldn't she save them both? You must remember that Mr. Flowers had repeated to her only so much of Judge Ranlett's conversation with Owen as related to the Downing case. She had no suspicion, even, of her brother's villainy. She now thought it would not be a bad thing to have two strings to her bow. For her own protection, as well as for appearance sake, she had to make inquiry before she openly proclaimed herself as Pearl's champion. Suppose she found out something bad enough to cure René, and disgust his rival! Remember again that she is convinced against her will about the Downing case. “We don't know,” she reflected, “why the creature was starving. If I could only find out those people with whom she lived first of all, and learn why they sent her away! I will write to mamma about it at once.”

And she did so.

The next thing was to sound Judge Ranlett.

"It's a bad business" he sadly said "take it any-how. My poor René is not a boy or a fool to get over it easily, or stick to it rashly. There are heaps of young men, you know, who think they are in love with a girl because others praise her, or pay her attention; but he didn't find out that he cared for Miss Herbert, till he heard her run down. That's a bad sign—shows that it had gone down deep. He's my only son, and I've got to see him made very miserable for a long time, or else—well after all she's a noble woman."

"Is she really so handsome?" Lady Pem asked, "she was a common-place little thing when I knew her."

"I was thinking of her character," the Judge replied. "If they had met only a few

years ago! Lord! how cross things go to be sure," he sighed.

"I can quite understand your feelings," said Lady Pem, "but when one is sure of one's position why should one care about what silly people may say? Of course René has told you that you may depend upon me, and you and I understand what a woman's 'no' amounts to when such a man as your son wants her 'yes.' I shall see her, and put that right. I suppose the wedding will have to be in the house of those—what are they? bricklayers? But I don't mind, I'll go, and Owen shall marry them."

The Judge flinched at these last words, and walked on in silence. This conversation took place on the third day after his arrival, and its scene was a wooded walk [which skirted the flower garden, and led to the lodge of Hadlow Hall.

"So you see," continued Lady Pem, "how confident I am about them in all ways. Did I tell you how my recantation was brought about? Well, it does not matter now. Of course you went deeper than I did—so kind and clever of you! Did you see those people with whom she lived as governess?"

"I did, and they spoke most kindly of her."

"But they turned her away."

"She left them," Judge Ranlett answered dryly.

"When was this? I am so stupid about dates. Was it before or after the Downing affair?"

"Before."

"Ah! then it must have been for something else" (a pause). "When they dismissed her—my dear Judge, she *was* dismissed; I have it from the best authority—

they couldn't have known anything about poor young Downing—could they?" (a longer pause). "Let me see; she left our house in May of the year in which I was married, and that is just four years ago" (mused the lady who was so stupid about dates). "She must have stayed with them quite a long time; perhaps she couldn't manage the children when they grew up. Was that so?"

From this direct appeal the Judge was unable to escape.

"Your ladyship has it from the best authority that she was dismissed," he said. "I must refer you to your informant for the reasons, I say she *left* them."

"Silly girl! I daresay she lost her temper about some trifle, and was rude. I shall give her a good scolding for not coming back to us. Mamma got her that engage-

ment you know, and could have easily found her another. Do you remember the people's name—Walker, wasn't it? or—Who can this be?"

The station cab, with a portmanteau on the roof, and one passenger inside, passed through the lodge gates and made for the Hall, as her ladyship spoke.

"Why, good heavens!" she exclaimed, "it's Owen."

Owen it was. When he caught sight of his sister he stopped the cab, vaulted over the lawn railing, and hurried towards her, utterly regardless of the flower beds.

"I'm on my way to Beckhampton, Claire," he panted, out of breath, "to see my father, and as I've found you so soon, I can get back to the station in time for the 5.50 train. Is that Judge Ranlett? Please don't go away, Judge. My news is for you also.

I've made my peace with Pearl. It's all settled—everything ! and she has promised to be my wife.”

“ Come in—come to the house,” gasped Lady Pem, “ I cannot speak here. Oh ! this is too *horrible*. I insist upon your coming in.”

“ No time. You'd keep me dangling about as you did before. Driver ! ” he shouted, “ you can turn round. Now, all I want you ” (this for his sister) “ to do is to write to the mater. I'm taking her your letter saying you are coming round to my opinion about Pearl, and now you can say that you have *come*. If you have any doubt left, ask Judge Ranlett. Write by to-night's post, please, because there is no time to lose—we are to be married this day week.”

CHAPTER XII.

DANGER.

"THE man is crazy!" exclaimed René, when he heard the news. "How could you believe him?"

"Sonnie," said his father, "I feel a little guilty about this. I didn't tell you all that passed between us that day, because I thought—honest, René—I thought it did not matter. I lost my temper—that's the truth. He seemed so confoundedly self-satisfied, and his friend, Mr. Flowers put me out with his cold-blooded sneers. I told them what ought to happen a skunk, and what a man would do. And, sonnie, that is how the idea of offering reparation came into his head."

"God help me," René replied, bitterly, "when even you work against me."

"My son," said his father, laying a hand on his shoulder, "look me right in the face. I haven't worked against you, least of all as you think in a deceitful way. I have worked with you, fair and square, but I never did like to think of that poor girl as your wife, and you know it."

"Now you are going back on her!"

"I'm doing no more than she has done herself. Going back on her! I think she has acted nobly. I respect and admire her more than ever."

"For accepting Owen Hilyar?"

"No, sir, for rejecting you."

"She did that out of mistaken love for me, and I love her—sometimes all the more for it; but to think that within three days she could give herself to another man—and *such* a man! It is impossible! I will not believe it till she tells me so with her own lips, and

then I shall know that he must have forced her consent in some unmanly way."

"If your feelings would let you think, my poor boy, you'd know that a woman will make any sacrifice for the reparation he has offered."

"Reparation! It is adding injury to injury. He has made her wretched for four years, and now he wants to blast her whole life. It shall not be. Father, you must make my excuses to Lady Pembury. I am not fit company for any one, and shall leave by the mail train."

"Sleep on it, sonnie," said the Judge, kindly, "and go in the morning if you must. What's the good of getting to London at one o'clock in the morning?"

"I must be somewhere," René replied; "it doesn't much matter where, so that I am alone."

During this conversation the following messages were on the wires :—

“ Lady Pembury,

to

M. Flowers, Esqre,

221, Arlington Street,

London.

“ R. rejected by P. H. O. accepted and gone to arrange with his father. Marriage to be in a week, do your utmost.

“ CLAIRE PEMBURY.”

“ Martin Flowers,

to

Lady Pembury,

Hadlow Hall,

Shropshire.

“ Too late. Decline to interfere, as good faith has not been kept with me.

“ MARTIN FLOWERS.”

Lady Pem crushed the yellow paper and flung it from her in a fury. "The wretch!" she muttered, "the false jesuitical wretch! Just because his shallow plot has failed, he throws the blame on me. Good faith, indeed! Did the creature take me for his servant. He was mine. They were all in a conspiracy against me. Oh! what an idiot I was to write those letters, and I cannot get out of them" (here she began to cry). "Mamma has hers by this time, and it will do almost what that fool wants."

The fool was Owen, and the letter to his mother was that which had been written when Lady Pem determined to do without Mr. Flowers. In it "dearest mamma" was told she would be delighted to hear good news of poor dear Pearl. She was almost engaged to be married to quite a nice young American, whose father had ascertained that all the

scandals against her were unfounded. Would she (dearest mamma) send by return of post the names and address of the people to whom Pearl had gone as governess? "I'd ask her," the writer concluded, "only it might make her think that I suspected something, and hurt her feelings." Lady Pem had paused over this last sentence before she committed it to paper, doubting if it were quite judicious; but she wrote it after due reflection. "Mamma," she thought, "is not strong, and her sight is bad. She might shirk the trouble of looking up her old diaries and letters, and tell me to save her the trouble, and ask Pearl herself." It struck her ladyship at the time that this was a clever blind; now she saw how it committed her, and played into Owen's hand. "Was ever woman so unfortunate as I am?" she sobbed. "He'll tell them that the creature refused her

other suitor for love of him, and they'll believe it."

She was certainly in a fix. No way of retreat, no means of attack, and her only ally had deserted her ! Writing to her parents would be useless, and she could not leave her guests to go to her old home and oppose in person the hateful marriage, or even get it postponed.

"The next thing will be," she lamented, "for Stephen" (meaning her sailor brother), "to come back with a black wife; but even that would be better than this. Oh, why did I give in at Barwell? Why didn't I denounce her then, and cover her with a mass of shame that no one could wipe away !"

One little crumb of comfort she found in René's departure. She insisted upon wishing him good-bye, pressed his hand, and whispered, "Dear Mr. Ranlett, it seems unnatural

that I should wish you success against my own brother, but I really do. Between ourselves he ought not to marry in his present delicate state of health. Write as soon as anything is settled, and telegraph if I can be of any use. Good-bye, and good luck."

Long before this Owen had arrived at Beckhampton, to the great satisfaction of his parents, for Lady Pem's letter about Pearl had thrown them into a high state of excitement, and curiosity. He told them more than they expected to hear, and exactly what his sister had anticipated. Never mind the questions that were put, over and over again. We know the story he had to tell and what he had to hide. Those old folks living for each other out of the world, were in turn delighted, perplexed, and astonished by his news. The child over whose downfall they had mourned, was rehabilitated—had

been sought in marriage by an honourable gentleman, with the consent of his father, who had thoroughly established her innocence—had refused him, and was going to marry their son in a week. They shed some tears—both of them; and one, an oath or two, “Poor dear little Pearl!” said Sir George, blowing his nose with unusual emphasis, “it’s enough to take one’s breath away. But what the deuce are you in such a hurry about?”

“She made it a condition—there are several conditions,” Owen replied, “some on my side, and I could not refuse this.”

“Most unusual thing for a lady to press,” said his father. “Good for you, though, in one way—there’d be no time to make any settlement.”

“Her fortune will be restored to the Downing family,” said Owen, quietly, “that can be done afterwards.”

“The devil!” shouted his father, “whose condition is that?”

“Mine.”

“You are a” (“d—d young fool,” was coming, but the baronet pulled up at an imploring gesture from his wife). “Come, come, Owen,” he said, “be serious. This won’t do. In the first place look at what it would admit. If it be right to give up this money; it was wrong to take it.”

“She was not my wife when she took it. I will not have it said that I married her for her money.”

“I never heard of anything so d—d absurd,” shouted the Squire, “and look here, Owen, if you imagine I’m going to help you, you’re mistaken. When you made almost as great an ass of yourself a year ago, as you are going to do now, I told you not to look to me for assistance. I spent over twelve

thousand for a parsonage and draining the glebe for *you*, and you handed it all over to that old fat fool Bland. Now you're going to make your wife throw her money into the gutter! Well, if no one puts you into a lunatic asylum in the meantime you can do so, but you won't get any of *mine* to throw after it."

"I quite understand that, sir," Owen said. "All I ask of you is to be present, with my mother, at our wedding. It will be a very quiet one, I hope Claire will come also, although—but she will think better of it. She has written very kindly about Pearl."

"Did I show you her letter to me?" asked Lady Hilyar. She had been present during the above conversation fluttering, mother-like, between the angry father and his quiet, but resolute son, and now jumped at the chance of changing it. "I sent my

answer by the mid-day post, as I never dreamed of seeing you."

She had not shown him that letter, and fortunately (as it turned out), had it not with her to show.

"Come," she motioned with her lips, over her still angry lord's shoulder.

Owen took the hint, and after saying a few soft words in aid of his last (and only request), left with his mother, for her own room.

Safe in this haven, the object for which they had sought it was forgotten. There was so much yet for a woman and a mother to ask and to say. Was Pearl changed? Was she pretty? Had he seen much of her? Was he sure she loved him? Had he thought of her in this way when she was a girl? Why had he not hinted something about it before? What did Claire say? and so on.

Some of these loving questions he could answer truly, and did so at length. Others (to his sorrow) he had to shirk, but on the whole the meeting was a happy one.

“God bless you both,” prayed his mother. “Take this kiss for yourself, my dearest ; and give this one to your Pearl. I will do my best to persuade your father. You must not mind his being cross about the money.”

Then they spoke of other things, and Owen began to fidget about the room like a man who has something in his mind, and doesn't know exactly how to get it out.

“Mother,” he said at last, “did you happen to keep that correspondence about Pearl when she—when she left us ?”

“I did.”

“Could you easily find it ?”

Lady Hilyar smiled.

“I had it in my hand this morning,” she said.

“I think Pearl would like to have it,” Owen observed.

“Naturally; the last letter spoke so highly of her. I told Claire to be very careful of it.”

“Claire!” he exclaimed.

“Why, yes. Dear me we’ve forgotten all about her letter! Here it is. You see she asks for Mrs. John Tracy’s address, and so I thought the best thing I could do was to send her the whole correspondence. Why, Owen my boy! are you ill?”

“A spasm!” he gasped, “I have them sometimes. It will pass. Could you—get me—a little—brandy—*yourself*. Don’t let any one know.”

“Great God!” he cried, when his mother had hurried out, “what a fatality! Now I see what Claire meant—my own sister!”

He referred to her last words as he drove from Hadlow Hall.

They were "Mind what I say, and tell her too. She shall *not* disgrace the family. I'll stop this marriage if I can, at *any* cost to *any* one."

CHAPTER XIII.

MISSING.

At the earliest possible hour René made his appearance at Upper Park House and asked for Miss Herbert. She was not at home; had gone out about half an hour; and the servant had no idea when she would return. As René stood undecided, a voice was heard from within inquiring if that was Mr. Ranellett, and, if it were, ordering that he should be sent upstairs "this directly minute."

He obeyed, and found Cissy on the drawing-room landing without her crutch-handled stick.

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" she cried, "come in and sit down, and don't mind me if I talk wild, for I'm clean out of my head,

and that's the truth. Do you know? Oh I see you know, who told you? Did she write, what did she say! Do tell me."

He told her what he knew, and how he heard it, and asked with diminished hope if it were true.

Being told with an outburst of tears, that it was, he set his teeth and muttered—

"Then he has put some villainous pressure on her."

"I thought so at first," Cissy sobbed, "but she says 'no.' She says he was quite humble, and implored her to save him—the wretch! from his remorse and his sin. Told her it was their duty to God, and preached and prayed; but it wasn't that, René—I must call you René now, poor René! She knew better than that. He's either a lunatic or a precious sight worser than he was before. She done it for your sake, René, to cure you."

“Did she say so?” he asked, in a low broken voice.

“In just them words, when I up and told her what I thought of her for loving one man and marrying another. ‘I’ll do it,’ she says, ‘for his dear sake.’ She made me swear I wouldn’t tell, but I don’t care! I’d break fifty oaths sooner than you should lose a chance.”

“Oh, Cissy, my good dear friend, if she has given that man her promise I have no chance. She will keep her word.”

“Then make him give it back. If I were a man I’d—I’d kill him.”

“Hush! for God’s sake,” said René, with a shudder. “You are indeed talking wildly, and my thoughts— No, Cissy,” he continued, with a forced laugh, “in this blessed old country of yours people like Mr. Owen Hilyar have it all their own way; besides

he's a parson. He couldn't even be cowhided in the street! To expose him would hurt Pearl. He is safe, and knows it—curse his black heart!”

“What is to be done?”

“I cannot even *think*, till I have seen her. When is she likely to return?”

“I don't know, she was out all yesterday buying—things.”

So they waited, went through the ceremonies of luncheon, and waited. About five o'clock George Marshall came home looking tired and perplexed.

“No,” he said, in answer to his wife, “there's nothing particular the matter, only I suppose thinking about Pearl has made me stupid—more stupid than usual over accounts. That sort of figures always bothers me.”

“I have studied book-keeping,” René said,

“and am supposed to be a pretty good accountant ; if I can be of any use I'd gladly help you.”

“ I wish to the Lord you would,” George replied, cordially, “and thank you kindly. You see Mr. Barkdale isn't a bit of good—to me. I thought he'd undertake the office work, and leave me all my time for my operations in the model-room and the furnaces ; but he don't. How can I attend to my experiments with men rushing at me every ten minutes with letters about this, and orders for that ? So if, when Pearl's nonsense is over, you'd give half a day to the books, you'd do me a real service. Isn't there any tea going ? ”

Five o'clock tea without Pearl, was like tea at any time without cream ; although little Mab did her best. She had often helped “Auntie,” and in her happy ignorance, re-

joined in the absence of that lady as it promoted her to be chief priestess on the occasion. She helped them all without spilling anything, and adjusted the "cosey" with extra precision to "keep Auntie's nice and hot."

"Why didn't Auntie take you with her to-day?" asked her mother.

"I don't know," said Mab, "and I'm sure I was quite good yesterday, though I was alone in the carriage ever so long waiting for her; but" (brightening up), "she didn't have the carriage to-day, so I suppose that's why."

Seven o'clock! dinner time, and yet no sign of Pearl, but a message from the kitchen asking if mistress would please to wait.

Certainly they would wait.

"What on earth can she be doing?" Marshall asked, "when did she go out?"

"About half-past nine," Cissy replied.
"Can anything have happened to her?"

"Nonsense! when a woman is shopping she pays no attention to time. She'll be in directly."

Eight o'clock! As the hour was chimed poor over wrought Cissy burst into tears.

"Who saw her just before she left," Marshall inquired. "Did you, Mab?"

"No," sobbed the child, with her arms round her mother's neck, and crying too. "I didn't know she was going."

"Nor I," said Cissy, "till I heard Martha tell René she was out."

"Would you mind my asking Martha a few questions?"

This from René, who had not spoken for the last hour.

Martha had no idea where Miss Herbert had gone. Yes, she got a letter by the post just

before she started. She said nothing except to tell her (Martha) to send for a cab. Oh yes, she went in a cab. Did she (Martha) know the number of the cab? No, but she knew the driver by sight. He had been to the house before, and she had a good look at him as she helped him carry out the portmanteau.

"*The portmanteau!*" exclaimed George, René, and Cissy in a breath.

"Yes, she took her middle-sized black one," said Martha.

"Why didn't you mention this before?" demanded her master severely, when he had somewhat recovered from his surprise.

"Please sir, no one asked me," whimpered the girl, "and I didn't think there was anything wrong."

"Wrong!" snapped George, "who says there's anything wrong? I suppose Miss Herbert can take out some dresses to be

altered if she wants to? If she has gone to her dressmaker's—it's all right," he added with a sign to Cissy, "and we needn't wait dinner any longer. So run round to the stand like a good girl" (this to Martha) "and if you can find the man, send him up here, cab and all."

The cabman's story was circumstantial and clear.

"Yes," he told them, "I knows the lady well. I druv her first to the station, and we got there just in time to miss the train, and there wasn't another for an hour. 'Never mind' said she, 'I'll drive in,' so I took her to No. 18, Martin's Place—where's that? Why it's a row of small houses back of the Wictoria station, a good four shillings from here with the portmantey, as I told her, and she paid like a lady as she is. Did I leave her there? Well, I did, and I didn't. She

got out, and when the woman come to the door, she sez somut to her. I didn't hear what it was, I was a getting the portmantey out—and the woman, she put her hand to her ear as if she were a bit deaf, and just at that very minute a man come up, and touched his hat to the lady—quite respectful—and said somut to her that I didn't hear neither, and then she paid me my fare, and he shouldered her portmantey, and they walked off towards the station, and that's all I know about it."

"Was the man a railway porter?" asked George.

"Might 'a bin—there's a many railway porters lives in Martin's Place; it's handy for 'em you see—but this 'un worn't on dooty coz of his togs."

"He means his clothes," Cissy translated for René's benefit.

“Should you know him again?” Marshall asked.

“Not likely,” said the cabman. “We sees such lots of porters and odd jobmen as carries baggage, that they comes all alike, somehow. I might pop upon him, and then again I mightn’t.”

“You’re a dayman?”

“Yes sir, I was just going back to the stable when the gal called me.”

“Will you take a night job?”

“Depends upon what it is,” said cautious cabby.

“Get a hansom, and a good horse, be back here in half an hour, and I’ll give you your fare whatever it may be, and a sovereign for —for luck,” said George. “Now then,” he continued to René when the man had departed. “It won’t do to trust to trains at this time of night. Wheels are slower, but

sure. But the first thing is to get some dinner, for the Lord only knows how late we may be. Cheer up old fellow. Why don't you see that this is all in your favour? She hasn't run away from *you* this time. It's all as clear as daylight to me. I never believed in her nonsense. Her heart has failed her. She's going to tell him so, and in the meantime—by Jove! yes! she takes a header like the fellow in *Olivette* and gets out of the way till the clouds are disappearing. Never mind; we'll find her, and back her up. Mab dear, do you know where Auntie keeps the champagne? Get a bottle, then; and we will drink good luck to second thoughts. For the Lord's sake" (this in a whisper to Cissy) "look pleasant, and say something. Make him laugh, or cry, or swear. Don't you see the man's choking."

If to Martin's Place were a four-shilling

fare the fresh horse must have been a fast one. The street was dark and deserted, and a good deal of ringing and rapping was required to arouse the inhabitants of No. 18. At last they appeared in a body—the man of the house armed with a poker, the woman grasping his right arm so that he could not possibly have used it, and a rear guard of four sleepy children some crying and all *en grande dishabille*.

A gift of the largest silver coin mollified the man, who thereupon consented to take part in what he had called "this 'ere little game." His "missus" he explained was very 'ard of 'earing; he had, however, a way of making her understand by the motion of his lips, without bawling. Yes, a lady called in a cab, not that cab, but another, and that gentleman (indicating their present Jehu) druv it. She was quite sure of that, and seemed to

think that his identification settled the case. No, she did not hear what the lady said, she wasn't there above two minutes, when the man came, and took her away. She didn't know what the lady wanted, why dearie her! if she couldn't hear the lady, how could she hear the man, she didn't know him. If they was to take her to prison that moment, she'd never set eyes on him in her life! No, the lady hadn't bin there afore. "Was there any one sick in the house?" This question, dictated by a knowledge of Pearl's innumerable charities, elicited a long catalogue of ailments to which the four children were subject. Tommy was hauled forward to show his ring-worm; and Eliza Jane to have her chest examined, but there was no evidence that Miss Herbert had ever been applied to on their behalf. The only other inhabitant of the house was a lodger, absent on professional

service, being a stoker in the employment of the London and Brighton Railway ; and no reason could be given why a lady should come to see *him*.

Disappointed, but still hopeful, they went to the station. No one there then had been on duty at mid-day. The night inspector was very civil, told them to whom they would have to apply in the morning, but added with a smile, that the description given of the missing lady would suit a good many others who travelled by all those lines. "There's a train about every ten minutes" he told them, "at that time of day, and we don't get much time to look at the passengers."

"That is so" said George, "but this lady lives near Norwood, and often comes here with a little girl. Some of the porters are sure to know her. We will come again to-morrow. Good-night, and thank you."

When they got outside, he added to René, "And we'll bring Mab. I know Pearl gives her sixpences to tip the men. We'll find her, never fear. I didn't expect any news to-night." (this was a fib, but in colour as the face of the man it was intended to console). "Come home and we'll put you up. Cissy may have heard something by the time we get back."

"Is it possible," René suggested, "that she has gone off with him? They never mentioned Owen Hilyar by his name now. It was always 'he' or 'him.'"

"Why, he's at Beckhampton."

"They might have agreed to meet somewhere."

"Don't you fret about that, I tell you she's given him up, and hasn't the pluck to tell him so to his face. We shall know to-morrow. She loves my wife too well to keep her in suspense."

They found Cissy sitting up for them, and Mab (who had prayed not to be sent to bed till papa returned) asleep on the sofa. The eager questions "Have you found her?" "Any news?" had to be answered with a sorrowful "No" on both sides, and then Cissy took her husband aside, under pretence of arranging a bed for René.

"She hasn't gone to stay anywhere" she whispered, "I've been to her room. She hasn't taken her travelling bag or a brush or comb or sponge or anything to dress with. Martha was right! there *is* something wrong and what shall we do? Oh! what shall we do?"

CHAPTER XIV.

NO NEWS, NOT GOOD NEWS.

It was true that Miss Mabel Marshall had a number of acquaintance amongst the guards and porters at Victoria Station. She had travelled backwards and forwards with her "Auntie" every day for more than a fortnight whilst the house at Norwood was being got ready, freighted frequently with numerous small parcels for the careful transport of which assistance was required, and tips received. You may imagine her delight when told she might have a share in the search. She pointed out half a dozen men in as many minutes who knew "dear Auntie," and when they found that there was "nothing up," about the tips, they fully admitted the honour.

But none of them had seen her lately—not for a week or more.

At the other platforms, although ably supported by some of these allies, they utterly failed. One by one every outside porter and odd job-man was found and interviewed with the cabman looking on, and declared they hadn't carried a portmanteau from Martin's Place, or hadn't seen any lady answering to Pearl's description come into the station with a man carrying her portmanteau.

Thus the scent was lost, so Marshall like a good huntsman made his "cast" back to Martin's Place. They found it swarming with children playing about in the street, on the footpath, in the doorways. As it was that day at noon, so might it have been at the same hour the day before. Cabs were unfrequent in Martin's Place. Their cab was stared at as though it were a circus waggon,

and when they got out of it, they stepped into a circle of admiring juveniles as into the arena of a show. At least the same amount of curiosity—perhaps more—would have been exhibited about Pearl, so George Marshall, holding up a shilling, said “This is for whoever can tell me where the lady who came here in a cab yesterday, went to.”

“I knows,” burst from a dozen throats at once, and when the struggle to be first had subsided, six distinct and different lies were told. I say *six* because there were seven informants, and one of them may have been right. According to one account she never went out of Martin’s Place at all, and the others sent her in every possible direction from both ends of it. In only one respect did they agree—no one knew the man. The hunters then returned to the station, and telegraphed to Cissy “No result—*any*

news ?” and waited for the reply which was “*None ; please go and see O. H.*” This had been determined upon beforehand, so off they drove at once to Arlington Street and found that Hilyar had just returned from Beekhampton ; indeed his cab was yet at the door, and Marshall noticed the labels on his Gladstone bag.

They found him shaking hands with Mr. Flowers, who on their entry subsided into an arm-chair by the fire, and continued his perusal of the morning paper.

“The fellow ” (meaning Owen) Cissy was afterwards informed by her lord, was looking “disgustingly well and happy.”

He turned pale when he saw René and stammered “Mr. Ranlett ! here ?—I thought you were at Hadlow.”

“I left the night before last, partly to see you ” René replied.

“Not with any ill feeling, I hope” said Hilyar. “Of course you have been told what has happened, and with the knowledge which unfortunately you possess, you must admit I have acted honourably and possess a claim superior to any you could advance.”

René merely repeated the word “*superior*,” but it was eloquent with scorn.

Before Hilyar could reply, George Marshall interposed “As there is a person present,” he said, glancing towards Mr. Flowers, “who perhaps is not aware that these are private matters, we had best leave them alone for the present. We have come Mr. Hilyar to tell you that Miss Herbert left my house yesterday morning, and has not come back. We want to find out where she is.”

“This is some trick” he angrily replied. “How can I say? why do you ask me? You,” turning to René, “know perfectly well

that I was at Hadlow to see my sister on Tuesday. Thence I went to my father at Beckhampton, and have only just returned. You are in league against me" (this to Marshall) "you, and your wife. You have induced Pearl to leave, or else have made her life a burden to her with your entreaties for that man, and she has sought peace elsewhere; but I shall know and"—

Here he seized a pile of letters which lay on the mantelpiece, eagerly scanned the directions, and tore two or three open.

"I know nothing, absolutely nothing," he continued, in a voice which trembled with suppressed emotions; "but I warn you that I will not rest; I will take every possible measure to thwart your schemes and expose you."

"Nonsense," replied practicable George. "We have no schemes. Miss Herbert is free

to come and go as she pleases, and to marry who she likes. If there's schemes about, *we* haven't nothing to do with them. We don't like her to marry you, and that I tell you to your face, and if persuasion would be any use we'd use all we have against you ; but to think that we would put her out of the way, or could if we wanted to, is rubbish. Now the sensible thing will be to let everything else drop till we find her."

"I will find her," said Owen decisively.

"Without any clue! Rubbish again. Well, good-day, sir ; when you want us you know where we are to be found."

"Stay," he interposed, "you are right. This has quite upset me. Good heavens ! Just as all was going so well, so happily ! You might give me what clue you have ; you will, won't you ? I am sorry that I—but I was astounded, angry, foolish. I admit it, and"—

"Oh, that's all right," Marshall interrupted. "We're all in the same boat so far. We've got to find her, and then let the best man win. You know more than we do one way, and we can help each other if we work together. Be frank with us, and we'll be frank with you. Tell us all you find out, and we'll do the same ; but no half-confidences, mind."

"I agree."

"Upon your honour ?"

"Upon my honour."

Then they told him (much as the reader has been told) what had happened, and what they had done, and got but little light in return. Pearl had promised, he told them, to be his wife under certain conditions, which he begged to leave unmentioned, as they could have nothing to do with her disappearance. It was arranged that he should see his parents and sister, and, if possible,

obtain their consent, but this she did not insist upon. Their marriage was to take place as soon as possible, and she (speaking on the Monday) fixed Tuesday week as the day. He was to let her know in person the result of his visit to Beckhampton, and had leave to call every day thereafter. If they (Marshall and René) had come a quarter of an hour later they would have found that he had gone to Norwood.

After a short consultation, Mab, who had been waiting in the cab, was called in and asked to describe, as nearly as she could, where her "Auntie" had gone the day they went out in the carriage (a hired brougham) together. In the first place had Auntie been to her bank?

No, Mab knew the bank well. It was in the Strand, "near that thing with the hobgoblins" (her flattering description of the

Temple Bar memorial). They passed that (after she had done some shopping in Regent Street), and went straight on, "oh, for a long way, until they came to an open place with a big building, and a black man on horseback, and then they turned into a narrow street, so narrow that their carriage had to wait at the corner until another one came out; and Auntie went into an office-like place with a lot of names on the door, and was there *ever so long*. A gentleman without any hat came out with her at last, and opened the brougham door for her. He was very polite. Then they went and had tea at a little shop, quite a common-looking little shop outside, but the things were very nice. Auntie left her here in charge of a woman who gave her (Mab) a cream tartlet—oh! so good! and went away on foot; no, she didn't say where she was going, only told me to

wait and be quite good for ten minutes. Then we did a little more shopping, and then we came home."

The expert Londoner will say in a moment, "They lunched at Birch's, and Miss Herbert transacted her business somewhere in Birchin Lane, or other street near it, in Cornhill;" but neither Marshall or René were expert Londoners, and Hilyar's knowledge of the City was limited. So they started with Mab as guide, and taking her to the "hobgoblins" aforesaid, told her to direct the driver. On they went. *Punch* office! she remembered that. St. Paul's? yes, they had passed that. Cheapside? all right! Royal Exchange? the very place! and there was the little shop of the nice cream tartlets!

The rest was easy—all but determining on which of the four firms whose names were painted on the door, to call first. There

were Souart and Grey, accountants; Geo. W. West; Day and Middlemost, and Winstanley Brothers. As they stood debating, the glass door of Day and Middlemost opened and a gentleman came out, who was instantly recognised by Mab. He it was who had seen Auntie into the carriage, and to him they applied.

Having said enough to assure him of the *bona fides* of their inquiry, he told them that his firm had the honour of being Miss Herbert's stockbrokers. She had called on Wednesday, by appointment, to receive the proceeds of a sale of stock they had made for her. The amount was a large one, twelve thousand eight hundred and twenty-five pounds in Bank of England notes. This was very shocking—had they informed the police?

He was told they had not, and council

was held whether they should do so. Did the information now obtained, startling as it was, warrant such a step? Miss Herbert had either disposed of that money during her brief absence from Birch's, or had taken it home. It might be safe, locked up in her desk. There was certainly nothing to go to the police about so far as the money was concerned, except that she might have had it with her when she went out the next morning; but even then, who could have known that such a sum was on her person?

At present all that could be done was—

1. Call at her banker's, and find out if she had paid in that money; or drawn any cheques since Tuesday.
2. Advertise, begging Pearl to communicate with her friends.
3. Take the numbers of the notes given to her by Mr. Day, and trace them.

4. Employ a private detective if all other means fail.

No. 1 was soon settled. She had not made any payment into bank on or after Tuesday, nor had she drawn any cheque. No. 2 was arranged thus—“*Pearl, Cissy is sick with grief; pray communicate. All secrets will be kept,*” and sent to the *Times*. No. 3 was put in hand, and No. 4 held in reserve. Then they separated; George had to go to the works, René to report progress to Cissy, Owen to consult his oracle—Mr. Flowers.

There was nothing in the compact, already stated, to exclude this gentleman; indeed, it had been made in his presence and hearing, for Marshall, posted by René, knew that in one point at least he was friendly to their cause, or unfriendly to Owen's, which came to much the same thing.

“I think,” said Mr. Flowers, when in-

formed of what had passed, and asked his opinion of it, "I think that the lady has more wisdom than we all gave her credit for. Whatever she may be, she is no fool. She does not like Mr. Ranlett well enough to marry him. She plays with you just long enough to mature her preparations, and—having taken you in all round—she draws a sum sufficient to live upon for a year or two without being traced through bankers and so on, and then she disappears. It may be that she is tired of a quiet life. It may be she has not gone alone. Her visit to—what was the street? Martin's Place, looks very like an assignation. How can I say with whom? What was she doing in London when she ran away from Barwell? Can you answer that? She might have met fifty men, and preferred any one of them to you or Ranlett. She is aware that old Ranlett

has been raking up her life, and is knowing enough to be sure he couldn't do so without reminding people about her. I think she has acted very prudently, and if you imagine she is going to leave tracks which you can follow, you have a poorer opinion of her than I have."

"She was not prepared for a journey of one day," said Owen.

"Bah! a woman with twelve thousand pounds in her pocket goes off without a tooth brush, and you build on that! It seems to me that any one could have devised such a blind. Don't you understand that the first few hours are all in all for a runaway? Grant these, and you may whistle for your clue."

"Nothing will convince me," said Owen, "that there is not some foul play."

"Then go to the police and tell them so.

They will build you up a theory, and find facts to fit it—make out she has murdered some one and run away; or that some one has murdered her for her twelve thousand pounds (which is probably invested in letters of credit), and get him locked up on suspicion. Any one will do. *I'd do*—haven't I been her enemy, as you call it? Haven't I said that a man who threatened a disgrace to Holy Church, as you have done, ought to be killed, if no other means could stop him? It would be better to kill the woman. Why not have *me* accused of murder, till Miss Herbert turns up at Spa?"

"I would like you, if possible, to be serious," said Owen.

"Well, then," replied his friend, "I will."

CHAPTER XV.

LADY PEM'S TRIUMPH.

“To be serious,” continued Mr. Flowers, “you have persuasive powers of a very high order. You persuade without giving the idea that you are persuading, and those who hear you, imagine that the force which is impelling them to do this, or leave that undone, comes from within themselves, and are flattered with the sentiment of their own innate goodness it conveys. But this power wears out. If instead of running off to your father to get a consent that was not wanted, you had remained with Miss Herbert, striking stroke after stroke whilst the iron was hot, you would have succeeded—to my intense grief. But you did not. You left her. Left

her to brood over a totally unnecessary sacrifice, to think of a life utterly unsuited to her, and to wean herself from the influence which in your presence, and under the spell of your silver tongue—yes, my brother, God has given you that in His service—for a time had held her. It is all as clear as mid-day sunlight to me, and it reads you the old lesson—God's ways are not our ways. He has called you as He did the fishermen of Galilee, and you *cannot* turn back."

"We might have served Him together."

"Never," cried Flowers, vehemently. "A man may leave father and mother and cleave to his wife; but leave his God—never! Will you let your lust for a woman sever you from your God?"

"Lust!" Owen repeated with a hollow laugh, "if you knew all, you would not use that word."

“ Love then, if you like. I suppose good Mr. Bland married for love. Your missionaries marry for love, so do your bishops ; and what follows—children, cares, garden parties, worldly speculations to pay dressmakers’ bills, an unquiet or a hardened mind, a perfunctory service, the death bed of an unprofitable servant, and in the end of all what I shudder to contemplate. Oh ! my friend, if you would cast off the slough of passion, and leave the noble instincts which are within you free to act, for your salvation, for your happiness here and hereafter ! Can you not understand that your Church, your Act of Parliament Church of England, is doomed ? Do you not see the writing on the wall which sentences the Papacy with its winking images and shams to extinction ? To thousands of thinking men this is clear. What follows ? The barriers which prevented you, and men

like you, from being Catholics, are broken down. The gulf which yawned between the old corrupted Roman Catholicism and reform is bridged. There will be one great, glorious, powerful Church in which you and I can be arch-priests. Oh, think of it; pure, irresistible, universal! its ritual gorgeous, its ministers, sovereign, no schism, no doubt, no fear. Oh, think of it!"

The leaden face that never smiled was lit up with a supernatural glow. The commonplace little form dilated, as these eloquent words were spoken. The old influence revived, and Owen listened with bowed head and aching heart.

"You talk of reparation," the speaker continued, "for a wrong done by a man who is a thousand times dead; who is no more the *you* who stand before me now, than your great-grandfather. When this woman was

yours, and you could have married her, you did not. Why? Because you did not love her. Absence, some maturing of her personal attractions, jealousy of another man, have stirred up the dregs of a worn-out passion, that is all. Let them subside, and then fling them from you."

"I cannot let you think so meanly of me," said Owen, "or of her. The dregs of my old passion have been thrown away long ago, thank God! and in their place a sentiment of the purest affection is arising in my heart; but she—Flowers, what I am going to tell you ought to be kept a secret from all the world; but after what you have said just now it must be told. I could not undeceive you, otherwise. Miss Herbert will be my wife only in name, that is one of the conditions of our marriage; her condition. What do you say now?"

"That you are an inspired idiot," Flowers replied, "and she knows it. There is nothing more to be said."

"No," Owen remarked, very quickly, "not even to call names."

Flowers winced at this retort. It went home and hurt. It hurt all the more because he felt that upon this subject he was not himself, could not argue with his wonted clearness, was unable to keep his temper; and so got rapped over the knuckles by a man whom in secret he despised. And the rap was well delivered, not so hard as to stun, but hard enough to sting. It sent the blood, which would have flushed another man's face, into his eyes, and lit them with an evil light.

"If you were a child or an angel, my poor Owen," he observed, "I would argue with you; but as you are a man, I—look me in the

face," he broke off, letting his hand fall on the table with a silent force which shook it, "and tell me, if you dare, that you *hope* even to be able to keep that compact, or expect her to hold you to it! You are silent! You cannot! Then I say, not calling names, but passing judgment, that you are acting the part of a rogue, the shallowest of rogues, the one who tries to cheat himself. Let us have no more of this," he said, rising to deprecate the indignant answer which was on Owen's lip. "For God's sake spare me something out of our wrecked friendship. Let me have the consolation of knowing I have done my best to save you, and some hope I may not fail."

"I cannot give you that," said Owen, subdued by his appeal. There were tears (or what looked like them) in the hard grey eyes which just now had flashed so keenly. "But

I will forget your insulting words. Yes, they were insulting! You are not yourself, Flowers, on this subject. If I were not as resolute upon it as I am, you are going the way that would make me so; but you mean well, and there is my hand. Only let this be the last of it."

"With all my heart," Flowers replied, almost cheerily. "Do me the justice to admit that I did not begin it."

"You did not, and some day"—

"There! there! You're breaking your own compact. You'll say something, and I shall answer, and we'll get at it hammer and tongs again."

In the meantime Lady Pem had received the Tracy correspondence, and not having heard of Pearl's disappearance, was pursuing her inquiries why she had been discharged from her first engagement as governess in that highly respectable family.

Mr. John Tracy was the go-ahead son of a plodding father, who had made a small fortune in days when plodding paid. His son took it up, made it into a big one by other methods suitable to the age in which he lived. Then, of course, he bought a place in the country and set to work "nursing" a constituency to send him to Parliament. This "place," purchased of an old county family that had neither plodded nor gone ahead, was almost out of visiting distance from Hadlow Hall, which gave Lady Pem an excuse for not calling on the new-comers. Now that Pembury was in the Lords she had ceased to cultivate her country neighbours for electioneering purposes, nor did she require them for social uses, as she preferred to fill her house with her London friends, and find her amusements in their more congenial society. So she did not go out of her way to call on the Tracys.

Now she wished she had, but it was not too late to mend. She excused herself to her guests in her own charming way. "Some such nice people," she said, "and I have behaved *barbarously* to them. They must think me a perfect *savage*," and off she drove to Tilden Park to call on "dear Mrs. Tracy," taking with her, to refresh her memory as to dates, the correspondence Lady Hilyar had sent her.

She came back triumphant! The "creature" (Pearl) was delivered into her hand, and there were still five days left in which to stop the hated marriage. By that night's post she wrote to her mother saying that "the creature's" rehabilitation was all a mistake, "got up by those horrid Ranletts in order to force her upon my poor infatuated brother."

"She" the writer explained, "is even worse than we took her for; but I have

not time now to tell you all she has done. I will write again as soon as I have seen poor Owen, and broken off the engagement."

Of course she could break it off. The "creature" had written those letters herself, sent them under cover to some one in London to be posted, and hastened to fling herself upon the streets.

In conversation with Mrs. Tracy it was surmised that this might have been the process. During the drive home this "might be" hardened in Lady Pem's mind into a "must be," and by the time she had taken her third dip of ink it became a positive "*was*."

Oh, the triumph! If Judge Ranlett had only stayed one more day, how she could have crushed him and his stories! and Mr Flowers! She could tell him she was glad he had thrown up the case, as she could act so

much more efficiently for herself. Looking through her anger as through a key-hole, she could only see what was right in front of it. Her mind, full of exaltation at being able to rub the whitewash off a woman she hated, had no place for another thought. She had suffered herself to be argued into wishing kindly about the wretch, and now she scoffed at arguments. Here was a fact, sharp, clear and black, which no one could reason away. She hugged it to her heart, she loved it, she feasted her eyes upon it until it blinded her.

In such an emergency as this, guests might be sent to—Hong Kong, for amusement ; but could hardly be told the reason why. A wise woman in some respects, Lady Pem was shy of giving reasons. Hadlow Hall is only an hour and a half by fast train from Charing Cross. By starting early she could

have it out with Owen, and be back by five o'clock tea; so she told her maid to wake her early, and have the brougham at the door in time to catch the 8.45 train. "Tell his lordship," she said with her foot on the step, "that I have gone to town on important business, which I had not an opportunity of mentioning to him last night. I shall return by the afternoon train."

Now in the "agony" column of the *Times* of this very morning, an answer to the advertisement we know of, appeared; and thus it ran—

"Cissy.—So grieved, but do not fret for me, I am well, and acting for all our good. Be patient and wait.—PEARL."

Owen had already been with the Ranletts to the office in search of a clue, but found none. How could they possibly tell who

brought that particular advertisement? It might have come through an agent. Yes, they had agents abroad. It appeared to be genuine, and so was published. The writing from which it had been printed was most probably destroyed by this time, but even if it could be found, it was not the practice to show such things to strangers.

So they came back disheartened, and yet another surprise was in store for them, but of this hereafter, as we must not keep Lady Pembury waiting as they did.

Owen opened the street door with his latch key, and all three were in his room before they knew who was there.

After a few words of greeting and apology, the Ranletts were about to depart when Lady Pem stopped them.

"I beg you will remain," she said somewhat haughtily, "what I have to say affects

you all. It is about the person you intended to marry, Owen."

"You may spare us on that score," Owen replied, handing her the newspaper with his finger on the advertisement, "read that."

The explanation which followed astonished her ladyship, and disappointed her. It was some relief to find that "the creature" had run away, but the credit, the delight of having routed her, was lost.

"It is rather creditable to her," Lady Pem observed with cutting scorn, pushing the paper from her as though it were some unclean rag, "not having the effrontery to face the world as the wife" (with a glance at René) "of any respectable man. She felt sure of being found out, you know, notwithstanding all the attempts made to whitewash her."

René Ranlett glanced anxiously at Owen, awaiting the reply which he felt ought to

come from him. None came. He was standing pale as death, and haggard beyond expression, but with a look of pity on his face as he listened to his sister's words, that puzzled his observer.

"We do not look on Miss Herbert's disappearance in that light, Lady Pembury," said René, as Owen still stood silent.

"Of course not," she replied with a sneer, "you believe what you have been told; and you, my dear Judge—you must excuse my saying that you have either suffered yourself to be egregiously taken in, or else"—the sentence was finished with a shrug that made the old gentleman's blood boil.

"Your ladyship's opinions are changeable," he observed as coolly as he could.

"Ye—s. They change with facts. Oh, I admit that you over-persuaded me. One does not like to run the chance of doing an

injustice, and so I allowed myself to be convinced against, what has proved to be, my better judgment. You were quite right, Judge Ranlett; this Pearl Herbert was not discharged by the Tracys, for the best of all possible reasons—she never entered their service. I have seen Mrs. Tracy, and she pronounces the letters engaging her to be forgeries, written by the girl herself.”

“She must be undeceived,” said Owen in a hollow voice, which made his sister start, and turn towards where he stood. Judge Ranlett grasped his arm and whispered, “Hush.”

“My dear boy,” Lady Pem went on, “surely Mrs. Tracy knows her own handwriting, and what motive could she have for telling a falsehood? She appears to be quite a nice person. If the girl did not write them herself, she got some one to do so for her,

which comes to the same thing. She is bad by inclination, she thought London was the best place to be so in fact, and so she hit on this plan to get there. It doesn't so much matter now" (in a lighter tone) "but it is well for you, dear Owen, to know what an escape you have had; and for your friends" (indicating the Ranletts) "to see that in such matters as these, a woman of the world is quite a match for any lawyer."

The look of pity on Owen's face deepened.

"I knew from the first what was in your mind," he said, "you will be sorry for what you have done. It will not make much mischief here, my poor Claire, but—how much about Pearl did you tell Mrs. Tracy?"

"Enough to let her know what a vile thing she is. Of course I wrote fully to mamma."

Owen gave a sudden cry of pain, and hid his face in his hands.

"I had been instrumental in misleading her," continued Lady Pembury, "and had to set her right."

"You have ruined me."

"I have saved you. How can you feel like this for such a creature. Be a man."

"I will! Ah, poor darling mother, who loves me so! You see" (turning to the Judge with almost a smile on his lips) "it is all over now. The worst has come, and this the relief. Have you forgotten" (to his sister) "that when Pearl left our house I"—

Here the Judge clutched him again by the arm, and whispered "Hush. For your own sake. She has gone. It can't hurt. Let it be." He quickly disengaged himself, and proceeded speaking to his sister in a voice that faltered now and then, but was wonderfully sweet and clear considering the emotion under which he laboured.

“First let me tell you what I have heard to-day. Pearl refused to marry the man of her heart for the noblest reasons. She promised to become my wife to cure him of his love for her. Good and true, she did not dare to go before God’s altar and swear to a lie. She could not love, she could not honour such a man as I am, and she has abandoned home and friends to escape the shame that I would bring upon her. Yes *I*. I your brother—forged those letters. I deceived you all, and her, and took her to London, to a ruin her pure mind never dreamed of. I was the destroyer of her innocence. If she had become ten thousand times worse than her most vehement detractor has painted her, the blame would have been mine. I trust that God will hold her blameless—man *shall*, if there be justice here. Your advice” (to the Judge) “was kind, but

I must not follow it. I am the sinner, and will bear all the punishment for the sin. Living or dead no stain shall fall on her. My mother must know the truth—it will almost break her heart. Well! if she ever came to know that—guilty as I am, I stood by, like a coward, and left this injured woman to bear my infamy, *that* would break it quite.”

END OF VOL. II.





